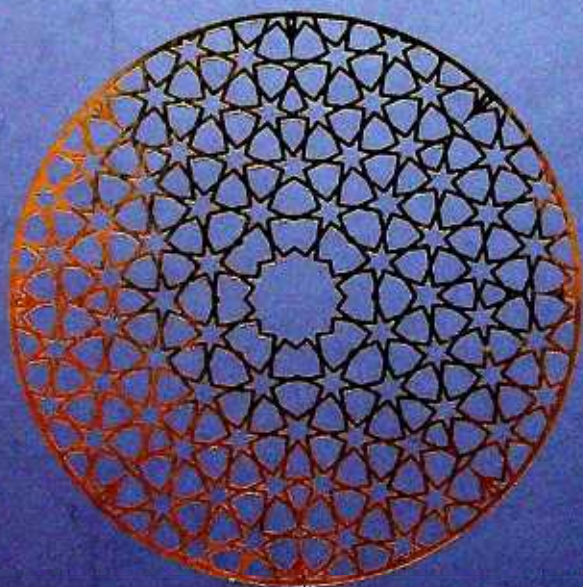


VOLUME 2

TREATISES OF
IMAM
AL-GHAZĀLĪ



IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ
ON SUFISM

TRANSLATED BY KHALID WILLIAMS

While many of Imām Ghazālī's other writings have some bearing on Islamic mysticism, this collection, **IMĀM AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON SUFISM**, comprises works in which Sufism—the purification of the soul, and the inward journey to God through the methods described by Muslim mystics, and *ma'rifa* (gnosis, or direct cognition of God)—is the most prominent theme: *Minhāj al-Ārifin* ("The Way of the Gnostics"), *Rawdat al-tālibin* ("The Meadow of Seekers"), *Mishkāt al-anwār* "The Niche of Lights"—a mystical commentary on the Qur'ān's Verse of Light (24:35)—and *Kimiyyā' al-sa'āda* ("The Alchemy of Happiness")—the brief Arabic treatise.

Imam Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 CE) is unquestionably among the foremost figures in the spiritual literature of Islam—and indeed of the entire world. Until now, however, many of his writings have only been accessible to those able to read Arabic. With the appearance in fluent English translations of this collection of Imam al-Ghazālī's shorter treatises, Ihya Publishing has taken an important step to fill the gap.

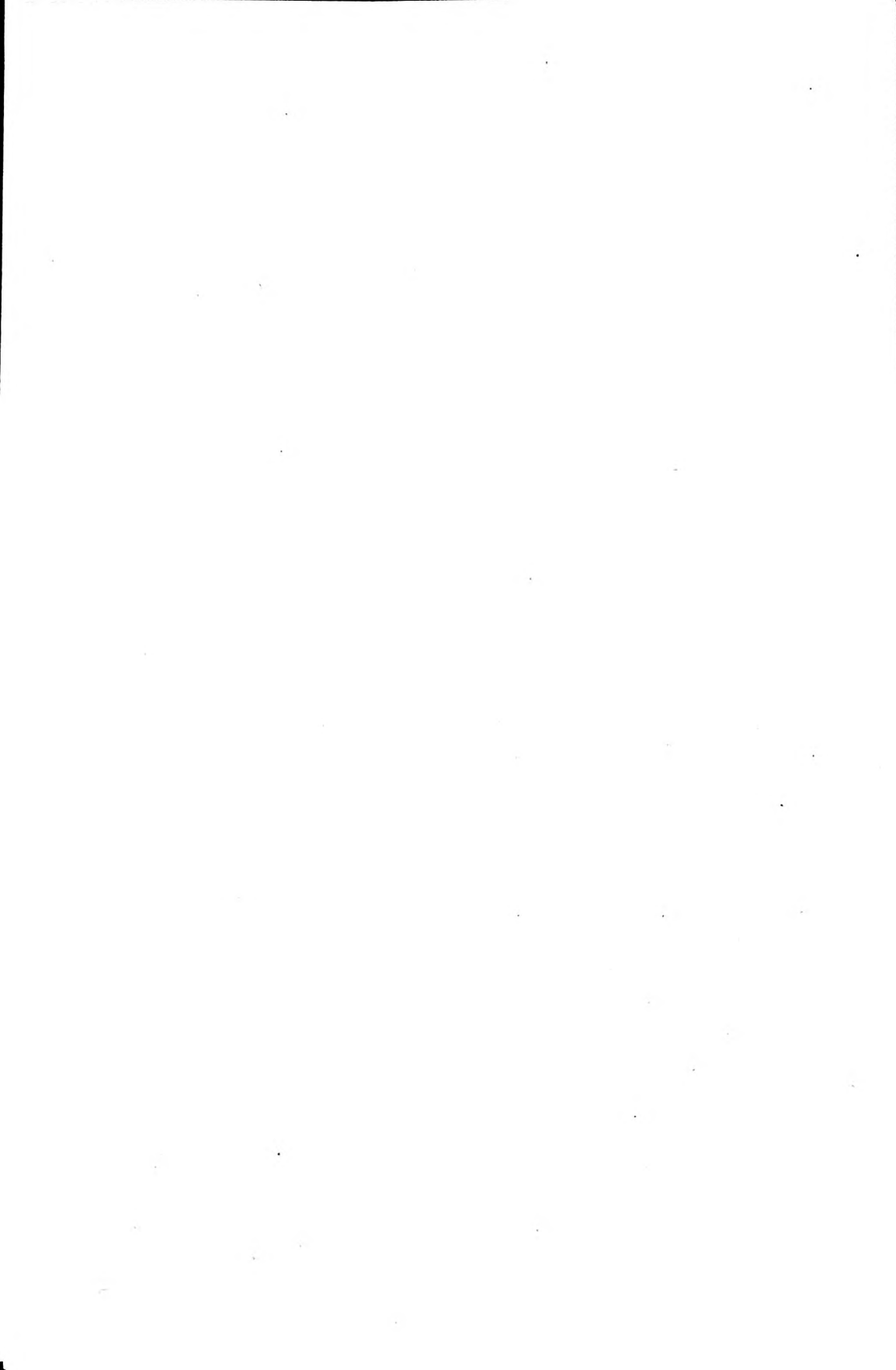




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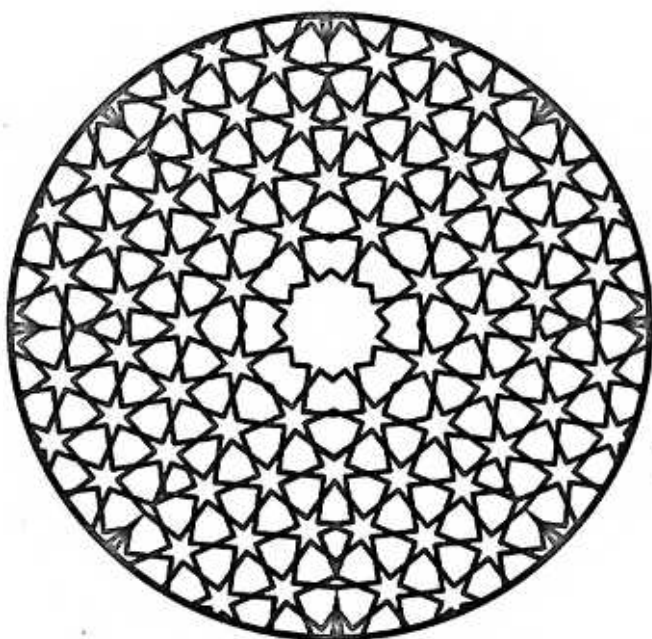
*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON SUFISM



VOLUME 2

TREATISES OF
IMAM
AL-GHAZĀLĪ



IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ
ON SUFISM

TRANSLATED BY KHALID WILLIAMS

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Dear friend, your heart is a polished mirror. You must wipe it clean of the veil of dust that has gathered upon it, because it is destined to reflect the light of divine secrets.

IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ

TRANSLITERATION KEY

• (i) ʾ (A slight catch in the breath. It is also used to indicate where the <i>hamza</i> has been dropped from the beginning of a word.)	ق q (A guttural <i>q</i> sound with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)
ا a, ā	ك k
ب b	ل l
ت t	م m
ث th (Should be pronounced as the <i>th</i> in <i>thin</i> or <i>thirst</i> .)	ن n
ج j	و w, ū, u.
ح h (Tensely breathed <i>h</i> sound.)	ه h
خ kh (Pronounced like the <i>ch</i> in Scottish <i>loch</i> with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	ي y, ī, i
د d	ﷺ Ṣalla 'Llāhu 'alayhi wa sallam—used following the mention of the Messenger Muḥammad, translated as, "May Allāh bless him and give him peace."
ذ dh (Should be pronounced as the <i>th</i> in <i>this</i> or <i>that</i> .)	ﷺ 'Alayhi 'l-salām—used following the mention of a prophet or messenger of Allāh, translated as, "May the peace of Allāh be upon him."
ر r	ﷺ Raḍiya 'Llāhu 'anhū—used following the mention of a Companion of the Messenger, translated as, "May Allāh be pleased with him."
ز z	ﷺ Raḍiya 'Llāhu 'anhā—used following the mention of a female Companion of the Messenger, translated as, "May Allāh be pleased with her."
س s	ﷺ Raḥimahu 'Llāh—used following the mention of a scholar or pious individual, translated as, "May Allāh have mercy on him."
ش sh	ﷺ Raḥimahu 'Llāh—used following the mention of more than one scholar or pious individual, translated as, "May Allāh have mercy on them."
ص ṣ (A heavy <i>s</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	
ض ḍ (A heavy <i>d/dh</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	
ط ṭ (A heavy <i>t</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	
ظ ṭh (A heavy <i>dh</i> pronounced far back in the mouth with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	
ع ʿ, 'a, 'i, 'u (Pronounced from the throat.)	
غ gh (Pronounced like a throaty French <i>r</i> with the mouth hollowed to produce a full sound.)	
ف f	



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*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

IMAM AL-GHAZĀLĪ ON SUFISM

The perspective and subject of Sufism were never entirely absent from the writings of Imam al-Ghazālī. This is particularly true of the works he authored after undergoing the spiritual crisis that he describes in *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl* (*Deliverance from Error*), when he withdrew from his public functions after being gripped by paralyzing doubts regarding the nature of knowledge and faith, and after a period of profound self-examination became convinced that the only means of attaining the most sublime knowledge was the Sufi way of *dhawq*, "experiential tasting." But even before this crisis the author was well-disposed towards Sufism. In his work on ethics *Mizān al-'amal* (*The Criterion of Action*), al-Ghazālī shows a marked preference for the Sufi way without going quite so far as to offer a wholehearted endorsement of it; notably he describes the Sufi practice of *khalwa* (solitary retreat) and the repeated invocation of the divine Name *Allāh* as a path to knowledge that cannot be attained through discursive thought. His *magnum opus* *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of Religious Sciences*) contains a wealth of anecdotes and sayings related about or from major figures of Islamic mysticism.

The treatise selected for this collection, therefore, are not the only ones in the *Rasā'il* compilations that mention Sufism or would be of interest to Sufis; the themes of Islamic mysticism can be found in many of the other treatises too. Rather, this collection comprises the treatises in which Sufism—the purification of the soul, and the inward journey to God through the methods described by Muslim mystics, and gnosis, or direct cognition of God—is the most prominent theme of the text.

The Alchemy of Happiness (*Kīmiyā' al-sa'āda*)

Al-Ghazālī authored most of his books in Arabic, including his most important work *The Revival of Religious Sciences*. However, he did occasionally issue works in his native tongue, Persian. With the original *Alchemy of Happiness*, the author rewrote the *Revival* in Persian—not a word-for-word translation, but an entirely new version covering the same themes in slightly less detail.ⁱ The text differed significantly enough for the first book to be abridged and translated back into Arabic at some juncture, and this is the *Alchemy* that is found in the collected Arabic treatises of al-Ghazālī. In the course of translating this Arabic abridgement into English, the Persian original was consulted at times when the Arabic seemed ambiguous or unclear.

The Alchemy of Happiness describes the process by which the heart is placed in “the furnace of spiritual discipline” to be transformed into pure gold. This begins with self-knowledge, for “the key to knowing God is to know oneself.” The author describes the outer shell and the inner meaning of the human being, and how the heart rules over the body like a king in his kingdom—a

i A full English translation by Jay Crook of *Kīmiyā-yi sa'ādat*, the Persian *Alchemy*, was published by Kazi Publications in 2008.

common theme in al-Ghazālī's writings, presented in differing ways to highlight various aspects of the soul and its workings. The author describes the faculties of the soul and how happiness lies in keeping them in balance. He warns that "beneath the skin of a human being there are four things: a dog, a pig, a devil, and an angel," and that the balance of the faculties will determine which of these natures dominates.

In the section on the bond between the heart and the world of divine dominion, the author describes how a window to the spiritual world can be opened in life by following the Sufi path of self-purification and the invocation of the Name of God. He stresses that this is an experiential path which cannot be described or studied but only "tasted." Lasting happiness ultimately lies in love and knowledge of God, and the Sufi masters provide the alchemy required to achieve them.

The Way of the Gnostics (*Minhāj al-ʿĀrifīn*)

The Way of the Gnostics is one of the treatises in this collection whose attribution to al-Ghazālī has been the subject of debate. W. Montgomery Watt, following Miguel Asín Palacios, rejected it on the grounds that the work contains no prologue in which the content of the book is set forth, nor any references to the author's other books. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī does not find these arguments convincing enough to refute the attribution altogether, since al-Ghazālī does not always refer to his other books even in those works of his which are known to be authentic. In any case, the treatise is a short work containing twenty-eight articles on various aspects of Sufism. These include a series of paragraphs describing the various activities of the day and their spiritual significance, which is similar, but not identical, to al-Ghazālī's treatment of the subject in *The Beginning of Guidance*. Several themes common

to the works of al-Ghazālī can be found throughout the treatise, including the importance of remembering death, the validation of knowledge through action, the avoidance of debate, and the central role of isolation in the spiritual path.

The Meadow of Seekers (*Rawḍat al-tālibīn*)

Like the previous treatise, *The Meadow of Seekers* is of doubtful attribution to al-Ghazālī. Many passages within it are certainly his, but the work is in fact a cento or compilation of texts from al-Ghazālī as well as several other authors—including some who lived after him. Thanks to the electronic indexing of many Arabic books in recent times, it has been possible to identify the origins of much of the material in the treatise. The *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif* of Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī is frequently cited, as are the author's own *Ihyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, and *Minhāj al-ʿābidīn* (which itself is of disputed authorship). Other works quoted include the *Shifāʾ* of Qāḍī ʿIyād, the *Maqāṣid al-rīʿāya li-ḥuqūq Allāh* of ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām, the *Risāla* of al-Qushayrī, the *Muqaddima* of al-Sulamī, the *Manāzil al-sāʾirīn* of Khwāja ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī, and the *Fawāʾiḥ al-jamāl* of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā. Some passages could not be identified; these may be from other works, or they may constitute an actual treatise of al-Ghazālī to which other material was subsequently added. The arrangement of the chapters is somewhat haphazard, as is the presentation of the material; some chapters are long and elaborate, others short and highly abridged, and the compiler's method of abridgement is not at all consistent, with some passages left untouched and others highly truncated. The arbitrary arrangement of themes is particularly apparent towards the end of the treatise, where the compiler presents several short chapters on various distantly related themes that are little more than lists

of popular aphorisms. This stands in sharp contrast to al-Ghazālī's usual approach, especially in texts of this length, where he paid great attention to the thematic arrangement of his subject matter.

Nonetheless, the treatise contains much that is valuable, and even the passages that are not from al-Ghazālī himself are from other major works in the Sufi canon. The work might best be viewed as a compilation of passages on major themes in Sufism which contained so many quotations from al-Ghazālī that at some juncture, whether in error or deliberately, it came to be represented as being entirely his work. One can imagine how it may have been used in a pedagogical setting, providing teachers in Sufi lodges with thematic material to use as the basis for *mudhākara* (instruction) in the traditional manner.

The Niche of Lights (*Mishkāṭ al-Anwār*)

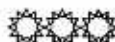
The Niche of Lights is one of Imām al-Ghazālī's most remarkable works. A commentary on the famous Verse of Light (Qur'ān 24:35) and a hadith about the seventy thousand veils of God, the treatise covers ground that the author does not touch in his other works, although even here he occasionally holds back from fully expounding on certain matters—not least because he avows that it is not possible to describe such things in words, for they are a matter of experiential "taste" (*dhawq*). The treatise contains three parts. Part 1 examines the nature of light, since one cannot understand the meaning of *God is the Light* without knowing what light truly is. Al-Ghazālī defines light on three levels of meaning, from the ordinary to the esoteric. He affirms that in fact the most seemingly esoteric of these levels is the literal one, and that God, the "First Light," is the only being deserving of being called "light" in a literal sense. All other light can only be figurative, being borrowed from His light, just as all other existence is borrowed from His

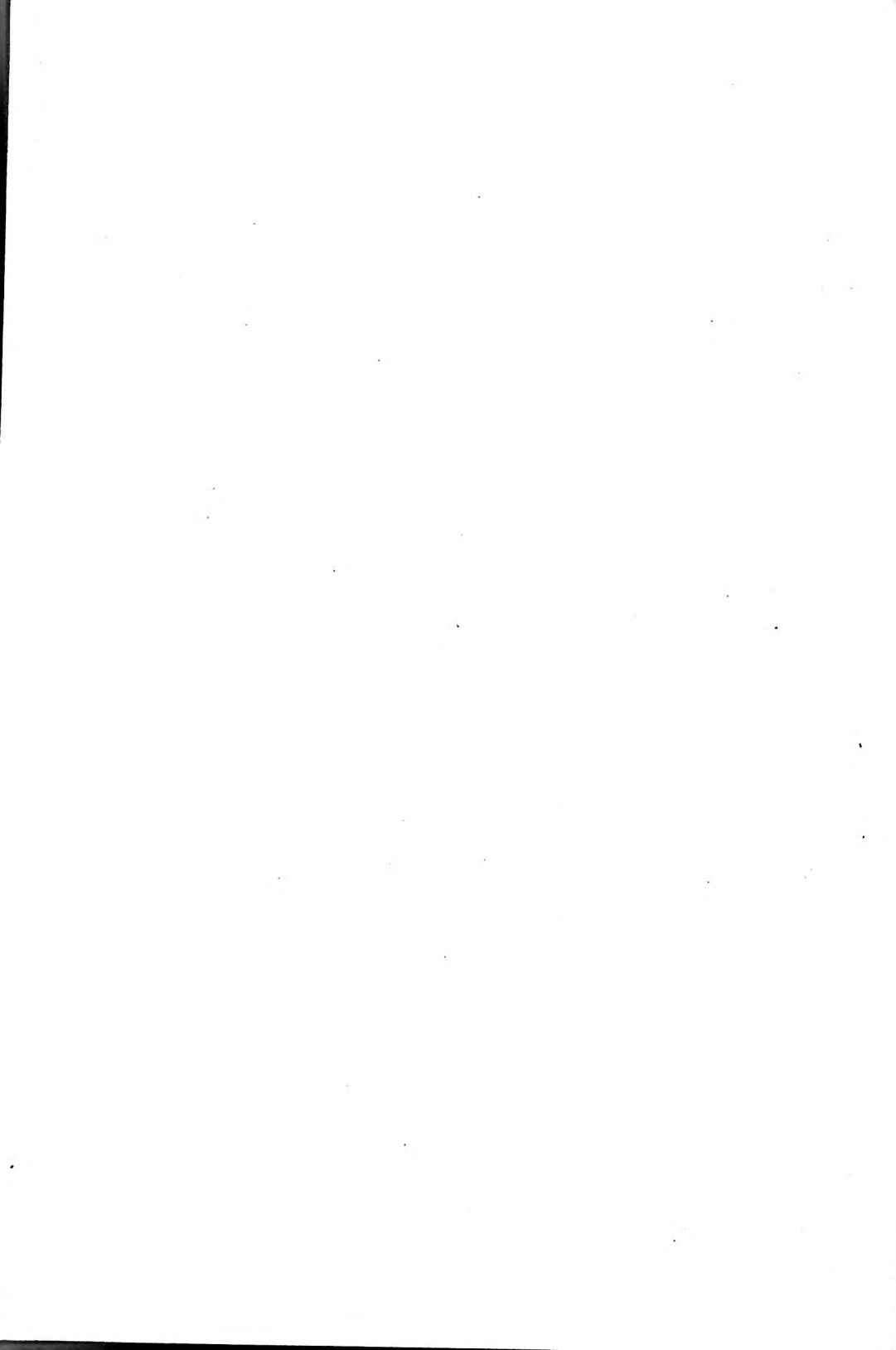
existence. "The true existent is God, just as the true Light is God." In these passages the author is touching upon themes that would later become more associated with the great sage of Andalusia Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabi, who was greatly influenced by al-Ghazālī and became a controversial figure in some circles, perhaps because he chose to give expression to some of the things that al-Ghazālī preferred to leave unsaid in works such as this one.

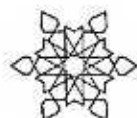
In Part 2 the author turns to the Verse of Light and explains the symbolism of the key terms in it: the niche, lamp, glass, tree, oil, and fire. Before doing so, he outlines the symbolic method, explaining how symbols provide a link between the higher and lower worlds and their attendant phenomena. He also describes the gradations of the human spirit, and how different people have differing aptitudes for apprehending spiritual truths. Having laid down this ground, al-Ghazālī then examines the symbols of the Verse of Light in turn and explains their significance and the relationship between them, and how they correspond to the gradations of the spirit he outlined earlier.

In Part 3, al-Ghazālī turns to the hadith about the seventy thousand veils of God, and examines how it relates to the diverse spiritual experiences of human beings, from those shrouded entirely in darkness to those whelmed in light. Between these two extremes are those veiled by both darkness and light, who have some knowledge of God but fall into heresies or misconceptions about Him; and those veiled by light alone, who cannot move beyond a conception of God that is contextualized by His relationship to His creation. Of the last category, "those who arrive" at the end of the path beyond the veils, the author is most reticent to speak, since this is a matter of experiential taste, not verbal expression; but he hints at how the self-disclosure of God is experienced differently by people depending on the degree to which these veils are lifted for them. Al-Ghazālī likens this to the Qur'ānic account of how

the Prophet Abraham o moved beyond visions of the star, the moon, and the sun, finally progressing to God Himself, the One Who "does not set." For others the ascent is immediate, as it was for the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. Either way the end is one and the same: The rays of His Face burn away all that can be perceived by physical sight and intellectual vision.

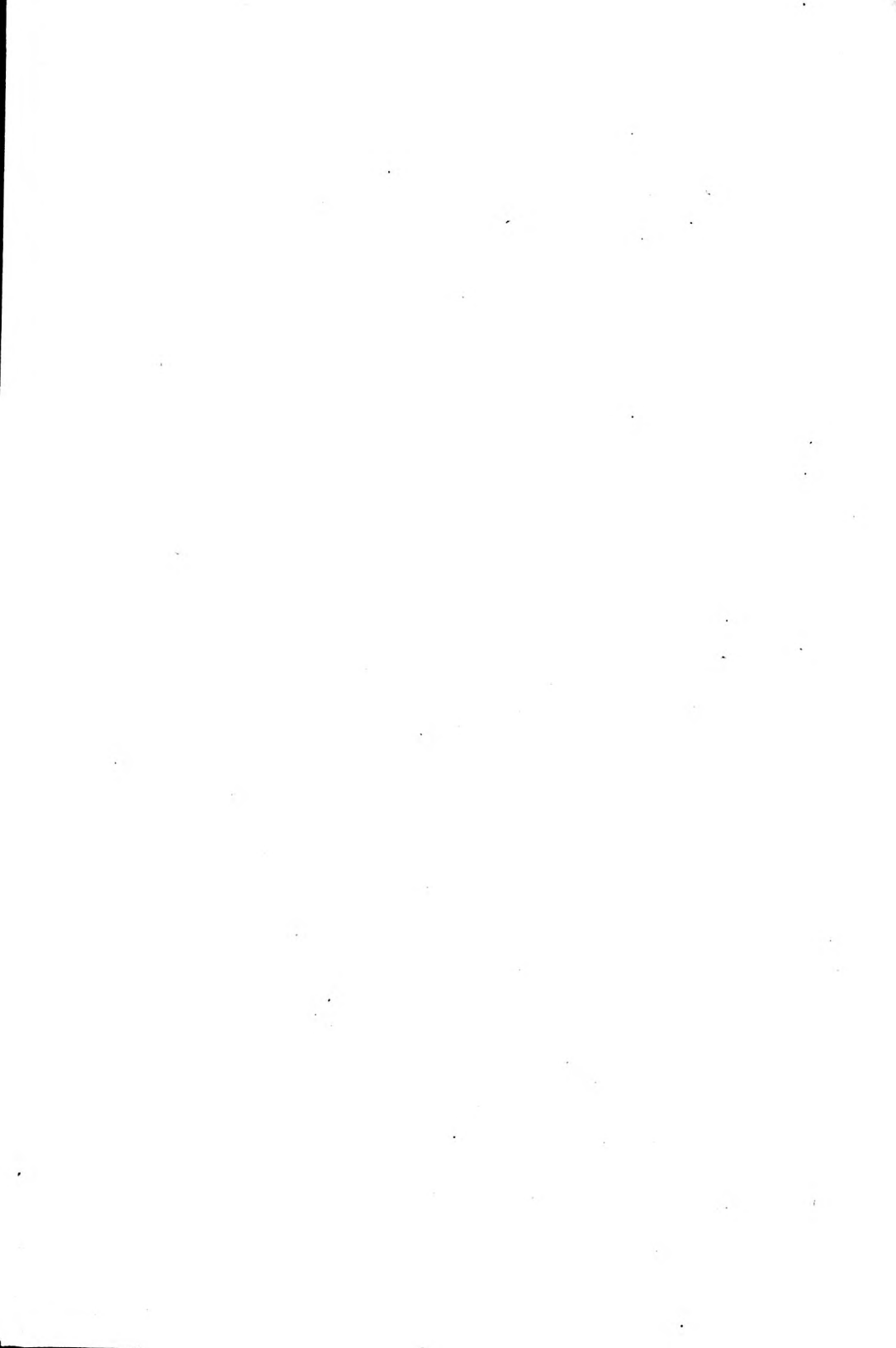






THE ALCHEMY OF HAPPINESS

Kīmiyā' al-sa'āda





*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

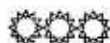
Praise be to God, Who raises the outer forms of the purified ones with spiritual discipline, delights the hearts of the saints with witnessing, adorns the tongues of the believers with remembrance, purifies the thoughts of the gnostics with contemplation, guards the masses of His servants from corruption, confines the desires of the ascetics to righteousness, saves the souls of the God-conscious from the darkness of base appetites, purifies the spirits of the people of certitude from the darkness of doubt, accepts the deeds of the pious by fulfilling their prayers, and strengthens the character of the spiritually noble with the most apposite of bonds.

I praise Him as one who has beheld the signs of His power and might, witnessed the proofs of His oneness and singularity, experienced the manifestations of His kindness and generosity, and reaped the fruits of His gnosis from the trees of His glory and munificence. I give thanks to Him as one who has wallowed in the river of His grace and favor. I believe in Him as one who has faith in His Scripture and His Word, His Prophets and chosen ones, His promise and His threat, His reward and His punishment. I bear witness that there is no god but God, alone without partner; and I

bear witness that Muḥammad is His servant and Messenger, whom He sent to defeat the forces of corruption and evil, to overwhelm the deniers and skeptics, to overpower the sowers of doubt and idolatry, and to aid the followers of truth and goodness. May the blessings of God be upon him and all his Family and Followers. Amen.

Just as physical alchemy is found only in the treasuries of kings and not of commoners, so too the alchemy of happiness is held only in the treasuries of God Almighty; in the essences of the angels in heaven, and the hearts of the gnostic saints upon earth. It would be fruitless to seek this alchemy from anywhere but the Presence of Prophethood, and any attempt to do so would yield nothing but fool's gold, whose owner might consider himself rich, though at the Resurrection he would be penniless. As God Almighty says, *Indeed you were heedless of this, but now We have removed from you your covering, so today your sight is keen* (Qur'ān 50:22). In His mercy to His servants, the Almighty sent to them one hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets to teach them the formula of this alchemy, and how they might place the heart in the furnace of spiritual discipline, rid it of blameworthy traits, and direct it back to the paths of purity. As God Almighty says, *He it is Who has raised up among the unlettered ones a Messenger of their own, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and Wisdom* (Qur'ān 62:2); that is, cleanse them of blameworthy traits and animal attributes, and clothe them in the attributes of the angels.

The purpose of this alchemy is to shed all imperfect attributes and assume all perfect ones. Ultimately it means to return from the world to God, as He says, *devote yourself to Him wholeheartedly* (Qur'ān 73:8). The merit of this alchemy is incalculable.





CHAPTER I

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

The key to knowing God Most High is to know oneself. As God says, Exalted and Incomparably Perfect is He, *We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves, until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth* (Qur'ān 41:53). The Prophet ﷺ said, "He who knows himself knows his Lord." There is nothing nearer to you than your own self, and if you do not know even that, how can you hope to know your Lord?

You may claim to know yourself, though you know only the outer body: the hands, the feet, the head, the torso. Yet you know nothing of what is inside you, what it is that makes you feel anger, arousal, hunger, or thirst, and makes you seek to satisfy these feelings, which you have in common with the animals. You must come to truly know yourself, so that you know what you are, how you got here, for what purpose you were created, and wherein lies your eternal happiness or misery.

Within you are brought together certain attributes, some of which you have in common with the beasts of the field, others with beasts of prey, and others with the angels. The spirit is your true essence, and all the rest is foreign to you. You must come to know this, and recognize that all of these beings have nourishment and

happiness. The happiness of the beasts of the field lies in eating, drinking, sleeping, and mating; if you are one of them, then direct your efforts towards satisfying your belly and loins. The happiness of the beasts of prey lies in ripping and tearing, while the happiness of devils lies in deceit, evil, and wicked plots; if you are one of them, then do as they do. The happiness of the angels lies in witnessing the beauty of the divine Presence, and they are impervious to anger or appetite. If you are of the stuff of angels, then strive to know your origin until you discern the path to the divine Presence and come to witness God's Majesty and Beauty. By this means you will free yourself from the chains of appetite and anger, and learn the reason for which these attributes were instilled in you. God did not create them for you to be their captive, but to serve you and aid you upon the journey that lies ahead of you. You must make one of them your mount and the other your weapon, so that you may set out hunting for your happiness. When you attain your purpose, plant both feet firmly upon it, and return to the place where your happiness lies. That is the abode of those chosen for the divine Presence, while ordinary believers will have their abode in one degree or another of Paradise.

You must learn these truths, so that little by little you may come to know yourself. One who does not learn them will have nothing but the husk, and God will remain veiled from him.





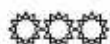
CHAPTER 2

THE OUTER SHELL AND THE INNER MEANING

If you desire to know yourself, you must first know two things: the first is this physical body,ⁱ and the second is what is called the soul, spirit, or heart. The latter can only be seen with the inner eye, for it is your inner reality. The soul begins where the body ends, and the heart begins where the soul ends. It is called the heart, but it is not the physical organ that sits in the left side of the breast, which even animals and corpses possess. That heart belongs to the visible world that you see with your eyes; the other heart is not of that world, but of the unseen world. It is a stranger in this world, and the physical organ is its vehicle. The limbs of the body are its armies, and it is their king. Its attributes are knowledge of God, witnessing of the beauty of His Presence, obedience to Him, and discourse with Him. It is the heart that is rewarded or punished, the heart that is happy or miserable. The animal spirit follows it and accompanies it through all this. Knowing its true nature and its attributes is the key to knowing God Almighty. You must strive

i Reading *qālib*, "shell, body, form", rather than *qalb*, "heart", following the Persian original (p. 15), which has "this external shell (*kālbād-i zāhir*), which is called the body (*tan*) and can be seen with the physical eye."

to know it, for it is a precious substance of the stuff of the angels,
a jewel mined from the Divine Presence, from which it came and
to which it will return.





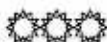
CHAPTER 3

THE TRUE NATURE OF THE HEART

If you should ask about the true nature of the heart, revelation provides no better answer than God's Words, *They ask you about the Spirit. Say, 'The Spirit is from the command of my Lord'* (Qur'ān 17:85). The spirit pertains to the divine Power and proceeds from the World of Command (*'Ālam al-Amr*); God Almighty says, *Are not Creation and command His?* (Qur'ān 7:54). Thus man is from the world of creation in one aspect and from the World of Command in another. The world of creation contains all things with a measurable size, mass, or modality. The heart, not being of that world, cannot be measured in terms of size or mass, nor is it susceptible of division. If it were from the world of creation, the fact that it knows some things and not others would render it divided between knowledge and ignorance at one and the same time, which is impossible. In other words, it is from the World of Command because that is an expression denoting those things that cannot be measured in terms of size or mass. This does not mean, as some have erroneously thought, that the spirit is beginningless. Yet it is also a mistake to say that the spirit is an accident, for accidents do not subsist outside of their subordination to substances, while the spirit is the origin of the human being and the body is

subordinate to it. Others say that the spirit is a physical body; that too is false, because bodies can be divided. The spirit, which we also call the heart, is the locus of direct knowledge of God, and is neither a body nor an accident. Rather, it is of the stuff of angels.

It is extremely difficult to know the spirit, for religion does not prescribe any means of attaining this knowledge, since it is extraneous to religion's purpose. Religion is concerned with struggle, while knowledge is a sign of guidance, as God says: *But as for those who strive for Us, We shall surely guide them upon Our paths* (Qur'ān 29:69). If a person does not engage in spiritual struggle to the best of his capacity, it is not permitted to discuss the subject of the true nature of the spirit with him. The first foundation of the struggle is to know the army of the heart; for if a man does not know the army, he cannot go to war.





CHAPTER 4

THE HEART RULES THE BODY

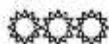
The soul is the vehicle of the heart,ⁱ and the heart has armies; as God Almighty says, *None knows the hosts of your Lord but He* (Qur'ān 74:31). The heart was created to work for the Hereafter and seek happiness there; and its happiness lies in knowing its Lord, which it may attain through knowledge of His handiwork in the world. Its knowledge of the wonders of the world is gained only through the senses, which are housed in the body, that being the vehicle of the heart. It must also have knowledge of its quarry, and of the net it will use to catch it. The body is composed of water, earth, heat, and moisture. It is weak and constantly threatened by dangers: hunger and thirst on the inside, and water and fire on the outside, as well as many other enemies which it must face.

It is therefore necessary to be acquainted with the armies of the heart. The external army is appetite and anger,ⁱⁱ which reside in the hands, feet, eyes, ears, and other parts of the body. The

i The Persian original (p. 18) has here "the body is the kingdom of the heart."

ii Here and in certain other passages in the *Kimiya*, *shahwa* and *ghadab* should, technically speaking, be translated as 'the appetitive faculty' and 'the irascible faculty.' However, 'appetite' and 'anger' have been used instead, for the sake of brevity and simplicity and because there is no real risk of any misunderstanding.

internal army is housed in the brain: the faculties of imagination, contemplation, memory, recollection, and estimation. Each of these faculties has its own unique activity. If any of them are weak, the person's situation will weaken in this life and the Next. Both of these armies are governed by the heart. If it commands the tongue to speak, it will speak; if it commands the hand to grasp, it will grasp; if it commands the feet to walk, they will walk, and the same for the five senses. In this way, the heart may protect itself and accumulate provisions for the Hereafter, catch its quarry, complete its commerce, and attain happiness. Its armies obey it, just as the angels obey Almighty God and never refuse His commands.

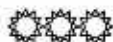




CHAPTER 5

THE HEART AND ITS ARMIES

A well-known proverb says that the soul is like a city. The hands, feet, and other parts are its precincts; appetite is its treasurer; anger is its police chief; the heart is its king; and the intellect is its minister. The king must govern them all so that his kingdom may be stable and prosperous; for the treasurer is a covetous, duplicitous liar, and the police chief is a violent tyrant. If he were to leave them to their own devices, the city would be destroyed. The king must therefore seek the counsel of the minister and place the treasurer and police chief under his authority. If he does, the city will thrive and prosper. Thus the heart must seek the counsel of the intellect and place appetite and anger under its authority, so that the soul may become stable and attain the means of its happiness, which is knowledge of the divine Presence. If the heart places the intellect under the authority of appetite and anger, the soul will be destroyed and the heart will suffer damnation in the Hereafter.





CHAPTER 6

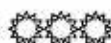
THE MANDATE OF THE HEART

Appetite and anger are compelled to serve the bodyⁱ and to ensure that its needs for food, drink, and procreation are met. The body in turn is the servant of the senses, which serve the intellect by acting as the nets and spies by means of which it perceives the glories of Almighty God's creation. The intellect in turn serves the heart by acting as the lamp by whose light it perceives the divine Presence, which is the true Paradise, beside which the lesser Paradise of gustatory and carnal delights seems trifling. The heart was created to behold the beauty of the divine Presence. He who strives to behold the glories of God's handiwork is a true servant of God, a youthful servant in the Divine Presence. For the Almighty says, *I did not create jinn and mankind save to worship Me* (Qur'ān 51:56); that is, "I created the heart and gave it a kingdom and armies, and made the body its vehicle, so that it might journey upon it from the world of dust to the highest heights." If the heart wishes to live up to this blessing, it must sit like a king in the breast of its kingdom, and make the divine Presence its Qibla and its goal, the

i The Arabic has *nafs* here, meaning "soul" or "self", while the Persian has *tan*, which can mean the same but has the primary meaning of "body", which is more suitable in this context.

Hereafter its home, the body its vehicle, the world its temporary abode, the hands and feet its servants, the intellect its minister, the appetite its governor, anger its police chief, and the senses its spies, each being assigned to a particular world to gather information about it. The imaginative faculty in the front of the brain is like the ambassador to whom the spies report. The faculty of memory in the center of the brain is like an archivist who collects the reports from the hand of the ambassador and keeps them until it is time to present them to the intellect. When the reports reach the minister, he may appraise the state of the kingdom accordingly.

If you find any of them to be rebelling against you, such as appetite or anger, you must struggle against them—but you must not kill them, for the kingdom cannot function without them. If you succeed in this struggle you will be happy, and you will live up to the blessing you were given and be honored for it when the time comes. If you fail, you will be unhappy, and woe and torment will await you.

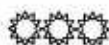




CHAPTER 7

PERFECT HAPPINESS LIES IN BALANCE

Perfect happiness is based upon three faculties: anger, appetite, and knowledge. They must be kept in balance. If appetite dominates a person, he will be negligent toward the Law and meet with ruin; and if anger dominates him, he will succumb to madness and meet his ruin. If the two are balanced by the direction of the faculty of justice, the path to guidance will become clear. If anger is too dominant, the individual may come to engage in violence and slaughter without compunction. If it is too weak, he will lose his sense of jealousy and zeal for matters both worldly and religious. If it is balanced, it will produce patience, courage, and wisdom. If appetite is too dominant, it will lead to iniquity and evil behavior. If it is too weak, it will lead to incapacity and laziness. If it is balanced, it will produce temperance, contentment, and other such virtues.





CHAPTER 8

THE FOUR NATURES OF MAN

The heart and its armies undergo certain states and attributes which are called character traits; some are bad, others good. Good traits pull one upward towards happiness, while bad ones drag one into ruin. All of them may be divided into four categories: the traits of demons, the traits of beasts of the field, the traits of beasts of prey, and the traits of angels. Base activities like eating, drinking, sleep, and procreation are traits of beasts of the field; irascible activities such as violence, killing, and enmity are traits of beasts of prey; selfish activities such as deception, cheating, and plotting are the traits of demons; intellectual activities such as mercy, knowledge, and virtue are the traits of angels.

Beneath the skin of a human being there are four things: a dog, a pig, a devil, and an angel. In all four of these, the goodness or badness lies not in their appearance but in their attributes. Human beings are commanded to dispel the darkness of ignorance with the light of the intellect, out of fear of temptation. Thus the Prophet ﷺ said, "Everyone has a demon; even I have one, although God helped me against my demon until I dominated him." So it is with appetite and anger, which must be kept under the control of the intellect so that they act only at its behest. If this is achieved, the

individual will have good character and share the attributes of the angels, and the seed of happiness will be sown. But if the intellect serves appetite and anger the individual will have bad character and share the attributes of the demons, sowing the seed of misery. He may dream that he is standing bound, serving dogs and pigs. He is like a Muslim man who takes a group of Muslims captive and hands them over to some unbelievers to imprison them. How will you fare on the Day of Resurrection if you hand over your intellect as a prisoner to your appetite and irascibility, betraying the king to the dog and the pig?

Man is in the image of Adam today, but tomorrow the truth will be revealed to him, and images will become pure meanings. A man who was dominated by anger will stand in the image of a dog, and a man dominated by appetite in the image of a pig, for images will be subordinate to meanings. The sleeping man sees only the reality of his inner state.

Now that you are aware of these four natures within you, you must vigilantly observe yourself at all times, whether you are still or in motion, and determine which of the four you belong to. Your attributes will remain in your heart and accompany you until the Day of Resurrection. Whatever righteousness remains will be the seed of happiness, and whatever evil remains will be the seed of misery. A human being is always either in motion or still. His heart is like glass, and his bad traits are like smoke and darkness; if they reach the heart, they will hide the path of happiness from it. Good traits are like light and brightness; if they reach the heart, it will be cleansed of the darkness of sin; as the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "Follow a bad deed with a good one, and it will erase it." The heart is either illuminated or darkened, and none will be saved but those who approach God with a sound heart.

i Or "the angel."

The same appetite and anger that exist in the beast of the field have been placed in the human being, but he has been given something else as well, wherein lies his nobility and perfection, and by means of which he may attain knowledge of God and the wonders of His handiwork, and save himself from his appetite and anger, and acquire the attributes of the angels. This is why he can dominate the beasts of field and prey so that they become disposed to him entirely; as Almighty God says, *And He has disposed for you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth* (Qur'ān 45:13).





CHAPTER 9

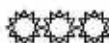
THE MARVELS OF THE HEART

There are two doors in the heart through which knowledge may enter. One is for dreams, the other for the knowledge of the waking world, which is the door that opens outwards. When one falls asleep, the door of the senses closes, and the door to the inner being opens. Unseen matters from the realm of Divine Dominion (*‘Ālam al-Malakūt*) and the Preserved Tablet are disclosed to one, like a revealing light. Such disclosures often require interpretation. Most people think that the knowledge of the waking world is more relevant, even though nothing of the unseen world can be seen there. The truth is that what is witnessed in the state between sleep and wakefulness is more worth knowing than what is perceived by the senses.

With this in mind, you must understand that the heart is like a mirror, and so is the Preserved Tablet, which reflects the images of everything in existence. When you turn one mirror to face another, what is reflected in each is reflected back in the other. Just so, the images in the Preserved Tablet are reflected in the heart—if it is emptied of worldly appetites; otherwise, the realm of Divine Dominion will be veiled from it. During sleep, if it is free of the attachments of the senses, the heart may gaze upon the substance

of the realm of Divine Dominion, and some of the images in the Preserved Tablet may be reflected in it. Yet even when the door to the senses is closed, the imagination still remains, and so what the heart beholds there is still covered by a thin membrane and not completely unveiled. Finally, when death comes to the heart as the person dies, there will be neither imagination nor sensation, and his vision will no longer be distorted by imagination or illusion, and he will be told, *now We have removed from you your covering, so today your sight is keen* (Qur'ān 50:22).

It is true of every person that correct and true thoughts come to his heart by inspiration—not by way of the outward senses, but entering the heart from where he knows not. This is because the heart pertains to the realm of Divine Dominion, whereas the senses were created for this world, the realm of the Kingdom (*‘Ālam al-Mulk*). That is why the heart is veiled from apprehending that realm as long as it is not free from distraction by the senses.



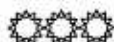


CHAPTER 10

THE LINK BETWEEN THE HEART AND THE REALM OF DIVINE DOMINION

Do not imagine that this window opens only in sleep or in death; on the contrary, it can open in the waking world for someone who engages sincerely in spiritual struggle and discipline, and frees himself from the yoke of appetite, irascibility, ugly traits, and base actions. He sits in an empty space, blocks the pathways of the senses, opens his inner eye and ear, and directs his heart toward the realm of Divine Dominion. He repeats again and again, *Allāh, Allāh, Allāh*, with his heart rather than his tongue, until he reaches the point that he is totally oblivious to his own self and the world, and he sees nothing but Almighty God. It is then that this window opens for him, and he sees in the waking world what he has seen in dreams. The spirits of the angels and Prophets appear before him, among many other majestic and beautiful visions; the dominion of heaven and earth is unveiled to him, and he sees things he cannot explain or describe. As the Prophet ﷺ said, "The earth was rolled up for me like a rug, and I saw from east to west." God Almighty says, *Thus did We show Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth* (Qur'ān 6:75). For the knowledge of the Prophets, upon them all be peace, was attained entirely through this channel, not

through the senses. As God says, *And invoke the Name of your Lord, and devote yourself to Him wholeheartedly* (Qur'ān 73:8), which means to cut oneself off from all things, purify the heart from all things, and devote oneself entirely to the Almighty. This is the path of the Sufis in this era, while the way of formal study is the path of the 'ulamā', which is of great importance in its own right but represents a mere fraction of the way of Prophethood. The knowledge of the saints is the same. It reaches their hearts directly from the Presence of God without any intermediary; as the Almighty says, *Then they found one of Our servants whom We had given mercy from Us, and whom We had taught knowledge from Our Presence* (Qur'ān 18:65). This path can only be understood by experience; and if it is not attained by direct tasting, it will not be achieved by study. What is necessary is at least to believe in it, so as not to be deprived of the warm rays of happiness that emanate from its masters. This is one of the marvels of the heart, and he who does not see will not believe. As the Almighty says, *Nay, but they have denied something they cannot comprehend, though its ultimate end has not yet visited them* (Qur'ān 10:39); *And since they will not be guided by it, they will say, 'This is an ancient lie!'* (Qur'ān 46:11).



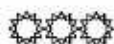


CHAPTER II

MAN'S INNATE DISPOSITION

You should not imagine that this is something reserved for the Prophets and saints alone. The very substance of man was created for this in the beginning, like metal chosen to be the material for a mirror in which the image of the world is to be reflected. Yet when a mirror grows rusty it must be polished, and if the deterioration is particularly bad it may even need to be re-smelted. Just so, when a heart becomes dominated by appetites and sins, it will not be able to reach this exalted level, even if it was once his nature. As the Prophet ﷺ said: "Every newborn is born upon the innate disposition of Islam." God says, *And your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny, and made them testify against themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said, 'Indeed yes, we testify'* (Qur'ān 7:172). Thus it is in the nature of human beings to believe in God; as the Almighty says, *the disposition of God, upon which He disposed mankind* (Qur'ān 30:30). The Prophets and saints are human beings; as God says, *Say, 'I am but a human like you'* (Qur'ān 41:6). All who reap will sow,

all who journey will arrive, and all who seek will find.ⁱ To seek must mean to struggle, and to search for a spiritual master who has already walked this path. To succeed at both can only mean that God has destined you for success and happiness by allowing you to reach that exalted level.



i The Persian original (p. 32) says the opposite, and words this passage in a more cautionary tone: *not* all who travel will arrive, and *not* all who seek will find, for the noblest level of human existence is precious indeed.

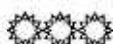


CHAPTER 12

ALL MAN'S PLEASURE AND HAPPINESS LIES IN KNOWLEDGE OF GOD ALMIGHTY

Each thing derives happiness, pleasure, and solace from what accords with its nature; and the nature of each thing is that for which it was created. The pleasure of the eye resides in beautiful images, the pleasure of the ear in beautiful sounds, and so on for the rest of the body. The pleasure of the heart lies uniquely in knowledge of God Almighty, that being the purpose for which it was created. Whenever a human being learns something that he did not know before, he feels happy, even if it is something trivial like chess; and once he learns it, he is loath to give it up, even if he is forbidden it. Just so, if he should come to attain knowledge of God, he will rejoice in it, and to cease beholding Him will feel unbearable. This is because the heart takes pleasure in knowledge; and the greater the knowledge, the greater the pleasure. If a man becomes acquainted with the minister, he will be delighted; but if he knows the king, his delight will be greater still. Yet there is nothing in existence more honorable than God Himself, for the honor that resides in all other things is through Him and from Him; all the wonders of the world are His handiwork. Therefore there is no knowledge more precious than knowledge of Him, and

no pleasure greater than the pleasure of knowing Him, nor any sight more beautiful than that of His Presence. All the pleasures of worldly appetites are tied to the soul, and will come to nothing at the moment of death. But the pleasure of knowing the divine is tied to the heart, and so it will survive death just as the heart survives it. Its pleasure only grows and shines brighter with death, for to die is to come out of darkness and into light.



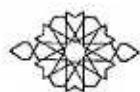


CHAPTER 13

THE WORLDS WITHIN MAN

The soul of the human being is a microcosm of the world, and every image of the world is traced within it. The bones are like mountains, the flesh is like earth, the hair like plants, the head like the sky, and the senses are like stars; one could go on at great length. The interior of man reflects the outside world, too: the stomach's activity is like a cook's, the liver's like a baker's, the intestines' like a tanner's, the force that makes milk white and blood red like a dyer's. One could explain this at great length, but the important thing is to know how many diverse worlds there are within you, all of them engaged in your service, working tirelessly for your benefit, though you do not realize it or give thanks to Him Who gave them to you.





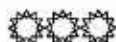
CHAPTER 14

THE COMPOSITION OF THE HUMAN BODY

The science of anatomy, which concerns the composition of the body and the functions of all its parts, is a most important branch of knowledge, though it is unknown to many, as is the science of medicine. Anyone who wishes to look within himself and behold the marvels of God's handiwork therein must know three things concerning the divine Attributes. The first is that the Creator of man, Almighty God, is All-Powerful, and nothing is beyond His ability. There is no work in the world more marvelous than the creation of man from gushing fluid, and the shaping of man in this wondrous image; as God Almighty says, *Truly We created man from a drop of mixed fluid, that We might test him* (Qur'ān 76:2). To bring him back after death is easier for Him still, because to recreate is easier than to create the first time.

The second is that the knowledge of God Almighty encompasses all things, for none of these wonders and marvels would be possible without total knowledge.

The third is that His kindness, mercy, and compassion are connected to all things—and these are infinite—as you can see in plants, animals, and minerals, which are imbued with such vastness of [Divine] creative power, beauty of form, and dazzling colors.





CHAPTER 15

THE CREATION OF THE HUMAN BEING

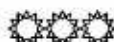
Knowing the details of man's creation is a noble science indeed, for it is the key to knowing the divine Attributes. It is to know the wonders of the divine handiwork, and the tremendous power of Almighty God. Yet it is triflingⁱ compared to the knowledge of the heart; for the bodyⁱⁱ is like a horse and the heartⁱⁱⁱ like a rider, and together they make the knight. Anyone who does not know himself yet claims to know other things is like a penniless man who has no food to feed himself, yet claims he will feed all the poor people in the city—which is impossible.



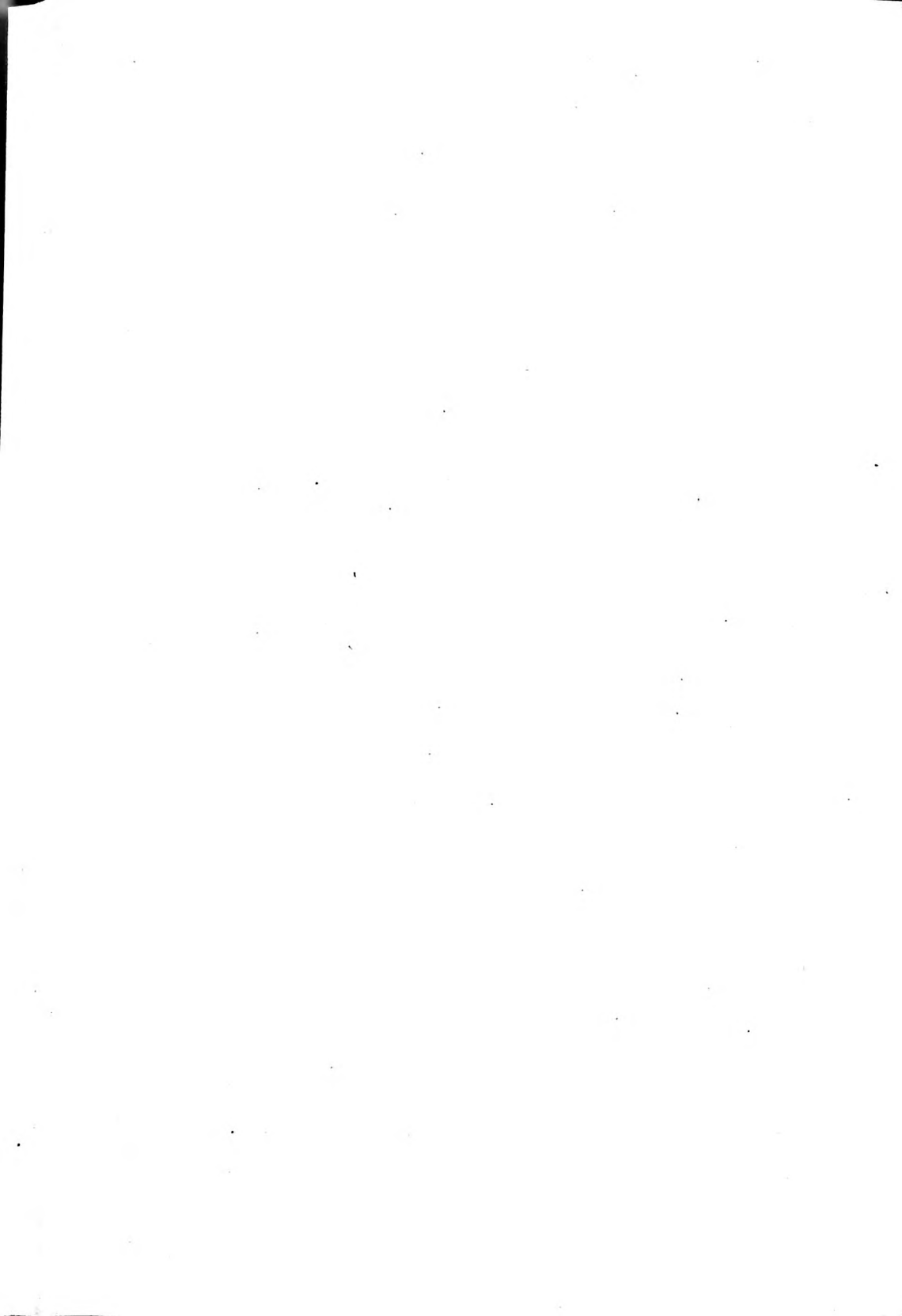
Once you are aware of this glory, this honor, this perfection, this beauty, this majesty—once you know that the substance of the heart

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- i This translation is based on the Persian original (p. 44). The Arabic has "it is a summary of the knowledge of the heart," which suggests that the translator was unaware that in Persian, *mukhtaṣar* can also mean "trifling" or "small."
ii Again this is *nafs* in Arabic but *tan* in the Persian, and "body" is more appropriate here.
iii The Arabic has here *'aql*, "intellect", while the Persian has *dil*, "heart", which is more in line with the preceding passages.

is precious indeed, and that it was gifted to you and then escaped your notice, and that if you do not seek to recover it but instead let it get away, you will sorely regret it on the Day of Resurrection—once you know all this, you must strive to seek it and forsake all your worldly pursuits. Any honor that does not materialize in this world will in the Hereafter be joy without sorrow, subsistence without annihilation, power without weakness, knowledge without ignorance, and tremendous beauty and majesty. Today in this world, there is nothing more powerless than man, for he is a pitiful, flawed being; and yet glory awaits Tomorrow if he will only apply this alchemy to the substance of his heart until it is purified of the taint of animality and rises to the level of the angels. If he should return to worldly appetites, even the animals will fare better than him at the Resurrection, because they will return to dust while he will remain in torment. We seek God's refuge from that, and we ask for His protection; He is the best Lord and Protector, and the best Helper. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, and may God's blessings be upon our master Muḥammad and all his Family and Companions.



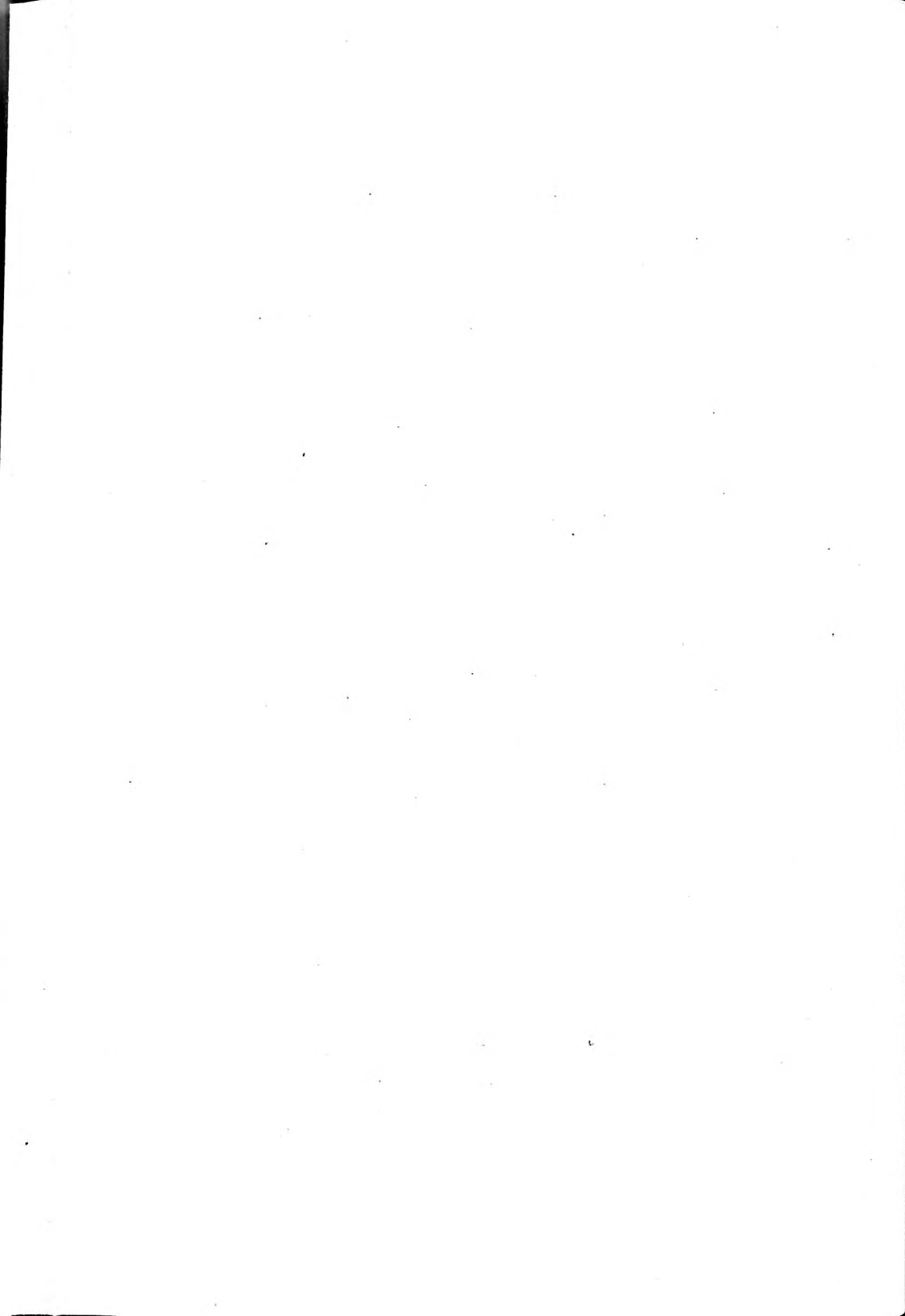
[Persian edition consulted: Ghazālī, *Kimīyā-yi sa'ādat*, ed. Husayn Khidiv-jam. Tehran: Intishārāt-i 'Ilmī va Farhangī, 1380 shamsī/2001].





THE WAY OF THE GNOSTICS

Minhāj al-ʿĀrifīn





*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

Author's Introduction

Praise be to God, Who illuminates the hearts of those having gnosis of Him with remembrance of Him, inspires their tongues to give thanks to Him, and enlivens their limbs with obedience to Him, so that they graze in the meadows of divine consolation and roost in the nests of love. He remembers them, so they remember Him; He loves them, so they love Him; He is pleased with them, so they are pleased with Him. Their capital is their neediness of Him, and their organizing principle is reliance on Him; their knowledge is the remedy for sins, and their custom is the curing of hearts. They are the lamps that bear the light of His proof, the keys to the treasures of His wisdom. Their leader is the full moon, the resplendent light, the master of mankind, Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the hallowed fruit of the blessed tree whose root is Divine Oneness and whose branch is God-consciousness, *neither of the east nor of the west. Its oil would well-nigh shine forth, though no fire touched it. Light upon light! God guides to His Light whom He will; and God sets forth similitudes for mankind; and God knows all things* (Qur'ān 24:35). *And he to whom God grants no light, has no light* (Qur'ān 24:40). May God bless him and grant him peace, with a blessing whose traces shine in the heavens, whose lights ascend in the eternal gardens, and whose

tidings perfume the assemblies of the Prophets. May He bless his pure Family too, and his purified Companions.

The Three Foundations of the Path

It has three foundations: fear, hope, and love. Fear pertains to knowledge, hope to certainty, and love to gnosis. The sign of fear is to flee; the sign of hope is to seek; and the sign of love is to give preference to the Beloved.

Analogous to these are the Sacred Precinct, the Sacred Mosque, and the Ka'ba itself. Whoever enters the Sacred Precinct of spiritual aspiration is safe from people. Whoever enters the Mosque, his limbs are safe from being used to disobey God Most High. Whoever enters the Ka'ba, his heart is safe from being occupied with anything but remembrance of God, Mighty and Majestic is He.

When morning comes, one must consider the darkness of night and the light of day, and realize that when either of them appears it dislodges the other from its position of authority. Likewise, when the light of gnosis appears it dislodges the darkness of disobedience from the limbs. If one can look at the state in which one finds oneself and be content to die in that state, one must thank God Most High for His enabling grace and protection. If one would not be content to die in such a state, one must change it with firm resolve and unreserved effort; for there is nowhere to flee from God except to Him, and no way to reach Him except through Him. You must sincerely regret wasting your life with poor decisions, and ask God to purify your outer being of sin and your inner being of defects. Cut the infidel's belt of heedlessness from your heart, and

extinguish the fire of appetite in your soul.ⁱ Stand upright upon the path of truth, and mount the steeds of truthfulness.

Daytime symbolizes the Hereafter, night the here-below; and sleep testifies to [the reality of] death. Each person will meet with what he did, and will regret what he left undone. God says, *On that Day man will be informed of what he has sent ahead and left behind* (Qur'ān 75:13).

The Properties of the Heart

The heart has four "inflections": it can be raised, opened, lowered, or paused.ⁱⁱ The heart is raised by remembrance of God, opened by contentment with God, lowered by preoccupation with other-than-God, and paused by heedlessness of God, Exalted is He. There are three signs that a heart is raised: it conforms to God, never goes against Him, and always yearns for Him. The three signs that a heart is opened are total reliance on God, truthfulness, and certainty. The three signs that a heart is lowered are pride, ostentation, and avarice, meaning concern for the world. The three signs that a heart is paused are loss of the sweetness of obedience, being oblivious to the bitterness of disobedience, and having doubts about the lawful.

Spiritual Nurture

The Messenger of God ﷺ said, "Seeking knowledge is obligatory for every Muslim" (Ibn Mājah 224). This means knowledge of

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- i The reference to the infidel's belt (*zunnār*) and fire (*nār*) alludes to Zoroastrianism, and hence to dualism. To cut this belt and extinguish this fire is to transcend dualism for pure Realization of Unity.
 - ii This is a symbolic reading, commonly found in Sufism, of the four possible states of a final consonant in Arabic grammar, which may take the vowel equivalent to U (called *rafʿ*, literally "raising"), or A (*fath*, "opening"), or I (*khafḍ*, "lowering"), or no vowel (*waqf*, "pausing").

every breath. Each breath the disciple takes must be an expression of gratitude or contrition. He must inhale with virtue, and exhale with justice. Obedient motion depends on divine grace, obedient stillness upon divine protection. This can only come with an attitude of perpetual neediness of God. The key to this is remembrance of death, for death is the ultimate release from confinement and escape from the enemy. This comes down to reducing one's entire life to a single day, which calls for contemplation at all times. Contemplation requires free time; free time requires asceticism; asceticism relies upon God-consciousness; God-consciousness is rooted in fear; fear lies in certainty; certainty arises from seclusion and hunger; seclusion and hunger are perfected by effort and patience; the path to effort and patience is sincerity; the guide to sincerity is knowledge.

Intention

One must have intention in everything one does or does not do, because "Actions are defined by intentions alone, and each person will have (the recompense for) just what they intended" (Bukhārī 1), and "The believer's intention is better than his action."¹ Intention varies from moment to moment. When a person has sound intention, he weighs down his own soul with burdens but gives no trouble to others. Nothing is more difficult for the disciple than keeping his intentions sound.

Remembrance

Make your heart the *Qibla* of your tongue. In the midst of remembrance, be conscious of the lowliness of servanthood and the awesomeness of Lordship. Know that God knows the secrets of your heart, sees your deeds, and hears the words you speak in

private. Wash your heart with woe, and light in it the fire of fear. When the veils of heedlessness fall away from your heart, you will remember God even as He remembers you. God says, *Truly the remembrance of God is greater* (Qur'ān 29:45); for He remembers you though He has no need of you, while you remember Him in the midst of your dire need for Him. And He says, *Truly it is in the remembrance of God that hearts find peace* (Qur'ān 13:28), for the heart finds peace in God's remembrance of it, while it trembles when it remembers God: *The believers are only those whose hearts tremble when God is remembered* (Qur'ān 8:2).

There are two kinds of remembrance: remembrance that is sincere, when the heart looks to none but God; and remembrance that is pure, when the aspiration is so annihilated that it is unaware even of the remembrance. The Messenger of God ﷺ said, "I cannot praise You enough; You are as You have praised Yourself" (Muslim 222).

Gratitude

With every breath you take, God's favors upon you are renewed; and you must be grateful for them all. At the very least this means to acknowledge that the favor is from God and to be content with what He has given you, and not to employ any of His favors in disobedience to Him. The fullness of gratitude lies in acknowledging within your innermost being that all of creation are incapable of thanking Him properly for the least of His favors, however much they may try to. When God takes someone into His care, He fulfills their gratitude on their behalf and is content with the little that they can offer, excusing them for their incapacity and weakness; *for your Lord's giving is unconfined* (Qur'ān 17:20).

Getting Dressed

Clothing is a favor from God by which the individual may conceal his body and his human nature; *but the garment of God-consciousness, that is best* (Qur'ān 7:26). The best garment is the one that does not distract your innermost being from God. When you get dressed, remember how God loves to conceal His servants. Do not expose the faults of others, but busy yourself with your own faults, and conceal them by begging God to purify them. To forget one's own sin is both a punishment for it and an addition to it. When you wake from the slumber of heedlessness, you should visualize your sins with your heart's eye, and it should weep for them, and tremble, and melt with shame before its Lord. As long as one relies on one's own power and strength, one will be cut off from God's. Keep your spiritual focus between fear and hope, *And worship your Lord until the Inevitable comes to you* (Qur'ān 15:99).

Getting Up

When you get out of bed, make your heart rise from the bed of sloth, and rouse your soul from the sleep of ignorance. Rise with your full being for the One Who created you. Bring your soul back to you, rise with your mind beyond motion and stillness, and ascend with your heart to the Sublime Dominion. Do not make your heart subject to your self, for the self is attracted to the earth, while the heart is attracted to heaven. Act upon the Words of God Mighty and Majestic is He, *To Him ascends the good word, and He uplifts the righteous deed* (Qur'ān 35:10).

Cleaning the Teeth

Use the tooth-stick, for it purifies the mouth and pleases the Lord. Purify yourself outwardly and inwardly from the dross of sin, and cleanse your deeds of the turbidity of ostentation and self-regard. Devote your heart purely to remembrance of Him, and keep yourself from what cannot benefit you and in fact harms you.

Answering the Call of Nature

When you answer the call of nature, reflect on how relief comes with ridding oneself of what is impure. Cleanse your aspiration and bow its head. Close the door to pride, open the door to remorse, and sit upon the carpet of repentance. Strive to heed God's command, abstain from what He forbids, and be patient with His Decree. Wash away your evil by renouncing anger and desire and replacing them with fear and longing, like those whom God praises by saying: *They hastened to do good works, and they called out to Us with longing and with fear and humbled themselves before Us* (Qur'ān 21:90).

Ablutions

When you perform ablutions, contemplate the clarity and limpidity of the water, and how it cleanses and purifies, for God has made it blessed: *And We send down from the sky blessed water* (Qur'ān 50:9). Use it upon the limbs that God has commanded you to cleanse, and become before God as clear as water. Cleanse your heart's face so that it looks towards none but God; cleanse your hands from reaching for anything but Him; cleanse your head from taking pride in anything but Him; cleanse your feet

from walking toward anything but Him. Praise God for inspiring you with His religion.

Going Out

When you leave your home for your mosque, know that there are certain duties that you owe to God Most High. These include tranquillity, dignity, and consideration for God's creatures, the righteous and the wicked alike. God Most High says, *Those are the similitudes We set forth for mankind; but none understand them but the wise* (Qur'ān 29:43). Close your eyes to heedlessness and desire. Give greetings of peace freely, whether initiating or returning them. Help those who ask your help with righteous things. Enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, if you are in a position to do so. Give guidance to those who need it.

Entering the Mosque

When you reach the door of the mosque, know that you have made your way to the house of a Magnificent King, to which none but the pure and sincere may be admitted. Think about yourself. Who are you? To whom do you belong? Where are you? In which register is your name recorded? If you have dedicated yourself to His service, you may enter, for you are permitted and trusted. Otherwise, you must stop short like a man who is utterly without options and has nowhere to turn. If God sees that in your heart you are seeking His refuge, He will permit you to enter, divested of yourself. God has mercy on His servant, honors His guest, and gives to His petitioner. He is kind even to those who turn away from Him, so what of those who turn to Him?

Beginning the Prayer

When you turn to face the Qibla, turn to face God. Do not be cheerful, for you are in no position to be so. Remember how you will stand before Him on the Day of Reckoning. Stand upon the feet of fear and hope. Lift your heart above regard for the world and creation, and focus your aspiration upon God, for He does not turn away the fugitive or disappoint the petitioner. When you say *Allāh akbar*, know that He is not in need of your service or remembrance; only the poor have needs, and He is utterly independent. He assigned duties to His servants for their own sake, that they might draw nearer to His clemency and mercy and further from His wrath and punishment. God Almighty says, *He bound them to the word of God-consciousness, for they were more worthy and deserving of it* (Qur'ān 48:26); *But God has endeared faith to you and beautified it in your hearts* (Qur'ān 49:7). Give thanks to God for making you worthy to stand before Him; for He is *worthy to be feared, and worthy to grant forgiveness* (Qur'ān 74:56); It is fitting that His creatures be fearful of Him, and He forgives those who are.

Reciting

God says, *So when you recite the Qur'ān, seek refuge in God from Satan the outcast. Truly he has no power over those who believe and trust in their Lord. His power is only over those who take him as protector* (Qur'ān 16:98-100). *Should anyone take him for a protector, he will make him go astray* (Qur'ān 22:4).

Remember your covenant with God in His Revelation, and make sure that when you recite His Book you do so with reverence and contemplation. Pause to reflect upon His every promise and threat, parable and exhortation, command and prohibition, and plain or

ambiguous statement. But I am truly afraid lest your focus on the rules of recitation lead you to be heedless of God's rulings. God says, Mighty and Majestic is He, *In what discourse, after this, will they believe?* (Qur'ān 7:185).

Bowing (*Rukū'*)

Bow to God with a humble heart and submissive limbs. Make your bowing complete by subjecting your will to His command; for you cannot fulfill your duties to Him without His help, nor reach the abode of His beatitude without His mercy. Nor can you refrain from disobeying Him without His protection, nor escape His punishment without His clemency. The Messenger of God ﷺ said, "No one shall enter Paradise by his own deeds." "Not even you, Messenger of God?" they asked. He replied, "Not even I, unless God envelops me in His mercy" (Bukhārī 5673).

Prostration (*Sujūd*)

Prostrate before God like a humble servant who knows he is created from the dust upon which all creatures tread, composed of a drop of fluid that all people disdain. When contemplating his origin and how his substance is composed of water and clay, one should be yet more humble before God and say to oneself, "Woe to you! Why did you lift your head from your prostration? Why did you not die there before Him, when God made prostration your means of drawing near to Him?" For God says *prostrate and draw near* (Qur'ān 96:19). To draw near to Him is to be far removed from all besides Him. Let your prostration conform to this verse: *From it We created you, and into it We shall return you, and from it We shall bring you forth a second time* (Qur'ān 20:55). Seek the help of God and no other, for the Prophet ﷺ has told us that God

Almighty says, "Whenever I look into My servant's heart and see that he loves to act in obedience to Me, I take it upon Myself to guide and direct him."

The *Tashahhud*

The *tashahhud*ⁱ is a formula of praise and gratitude to God; to recite it is to expose oneself to an increase in His grace and constant favor. Let go of all your claims, and be a servant to Him in your deeds as you are in your words. You were created as a servant, and were commanded to be a servant to Him, just as He created you. *It is not for any believing man or woman, when God and His Messenger have decreed a matter, to have any choice in the matter* (Qur'ān 33:36). *Your Lord creates what He will, and chooses; no choice have they* (Qur'ān 28:68).

Put your servanthood into action by being content with His decree, and act upon your worship by conforming to His command. Invoke blessings upon His Beloved [Prophet] after praising Him, for to love His Beloved is to love Him, and to obey him is to obey Him, and to follow him is to follow Him. God says, *Say, 'If you love God, follow me, and God will love you...'* (Qur'ān 3:31); *Whoever obeys the Messenger obeys God* (Qur'ān 4:80); *Truly those who pledge allegiance to you pledge allegiance to God, no less* (Qur'ān 48:10). He commanded His Messenger to pray for forgiveness for you, saying *Know, then, that there is no god but God; and ask forgiveness for your sin and for the believing men and women* (Qur'ān 47:19); and He commanded you to invoke blessings upon him, saying, *Truly God and His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe, invoke blessings upon*

i The testification of faith which is recited to conclude the prayer and after every two cycles before standing.

him and salute him with abundant salutation (Qur'ān 33:56). The Messenger of God ﷺ said, "When someone invokes one blessing upon me, God invokes ten blessings upon him, and treats him graciously" (Muslim 384). God Most High says, *And [did We not] elevate your renown?* (Qur'ān 94:4). He then commanded him justly regarding his interactions, telling others, *And when the prayer is over, disperse in the land* (Qur'ān 62:10), but telling him, *So when you are free, toil on and fix your desire upon your Lord* (Qur'ān 94:7-8).

The Concluding *Salām*

Al-Salām, Peace, is one of the Names of God which He vouchsafed to His creatures, so that they might employ it in their interactions with one another. If you desire peace for yourself then make sure that your fellow man receives only peace from you, and have mercy upon those who do not have mercy on themselves. For people are always beset by trials and tribulations: sometimes tried with favors to test their gratitude, sometimes with difficulties to test their patience. God says, *As for man, when his Lord tests him by honoring him and blessing him, he says, 'My Lord has honored me!' Yet when he tests him by straitening his provision, he says, 'My Lord has disgraced me!' No indeed!...* (Qur'ān 89:15-17). Honor lies in obeying Him, and disgrace in disobeying Him. When someone becomes engrossed with vain desire, God disgraces him.

Supplication

Observe the proper conduct of supplication, and keep in mind the One to Whom you are supplicating, and how and why you are supplicating to Him. Supplication means for every fiber of your being to respond to God. If you do not meet the proper conditions

of supplication, do not expect a response. [When asked to supplicate for rain,] Mālik ibn Dīnārⁱ said, "Do you think that rain is overdue? I am surprised it is not yet raining stones!"ⁱⁱ Even if God, all Glory be to Him, had not commanded us to supplicate to Him, we would be bound to do so. Even if He had not stipulated that He would answer our prayers, He would answer them in His grace if we called upon Him sincerely. Why should He not answer, then, when He has promised to do so as long as His stipulations are met? God says, *Say, 'What worth would my Lord give you, were it not for your prayers?'* (Qur'ān 25:77). He says also, *Call upon Me and I will respond to you* (Qur'ān 40:60).

Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmīⁱⁱⁱ was asked about the Supreme Name of God. He replied, "Empty your heart of all but Him, and call upon Him by whatever Name you please." Yaḥyā ibn Mu'ādh said, "Seek the Owner of the Name." The Messenger of God ﷺ said, "God does not answer the supplication of an inattentive heart."

If you are sincere, rejoice in one of three things: either your request will be granted, or something greater still will be stored up for you, or you will be protected from tribulation that would have destroyed you. Supplicate like one crying out to be saved, not merely asking for advice.

It is related that the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "God says, Hallowed and Exalted is He, 'If someone is so engrossed in Me that He does not ask of Me, I give him more than I give to those who ask.'" Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Warrāq^{iv} said, "I prayed to God once, and He answered my prayer—and then I forgot all my needs."

i A renowned Persian scholar and ascetic (d. ca. 130/748).

ii As divine punishment for human misdeeds.

iii One of the great Persian Sufis (d. 234/848).

iv A scholar and Sufi from Nishapur in Khorasan (d. before 320/932).

Keep your duty to God, Mighty and Majestic is He, when supplicating, and do not worry about your interests, for He knows what is best for you.

Fasting

When you fast, make the intention to restrain your soul from its appetites, because fasting means to annihilate the soul's desire and purify the heart as well as denying food to the body. It is also a reminder to be kind to the poor, to turn to God and give thanks to Him for His blessings, and to ask Him to lighten one's reckoning. The very fact that God has blessed you with the opportunity to fast is a gift you could not possibly repay with sufficient gratitude, never mind expecting recompense for it.

Zakat

You owe zakat to God for every part of your being. The zakat of the heart is reflection upon His magnificence, wisdom, power, proof, favor, and mercy. The zakat of the eyes is to behold things contemplatively and to lower the gaze from [the objects of] one's appetites. The zakat of the ears is to listen to all of that in which your salvation lies. The zakat of the tongue is to utter whatever draws you nearer to Him. The zakat of the hands is to withdraw them from evil and reach them towards good. The zakat of the feet is to walk towards all that is good for your heart and your faith.

Pilgrimage (Hajj)

When the disciple goes on pilgrimage, he must include in his intention the fear of rejection, and prepare for the journey as if he does not expect to return. He must keep good company along the

way. When entering consecration (*ihram*), he must divest himself of himself, wash away his sins, and don the garb of truthfulness and fidelity. He must call out the *talbiya*ⁱ in allegiance to God and in response to His summons. Within the Sacred Precinct (*Haram*), he must renounce (*ahrama*) all that would distance him from God Most High. He must circumambulate with his heart around the footstool of God's grace. When standing at Šafā he must purify (*šaffā*) his outer and inner being and run, fleeing, from his base desire. At 'Arafa, he must confess (*i'tarafa*) his sins to God. At Muzdalifa, he must draw nearer (*izdalafa*) to Him. At Minā, he must he must not wish (*tamannā*) from God for anything that is not lawful for him. When he stones the Pillars of Jamarāt, he must stone his appetites. He must slaughter his base desire and shave off his sins. He must visit the Houseⁱⁱ and pay reverence to its Master, and greet the Black Stone expressing contentment for His decree. When performing the farewell circumambulation, he must bid farewell to everything but God.

Safety

Seek safety always, since even those who seek it rarely find it, while those who risk tribulation may be certain that it will befall them. Safety is rare indeed in these times, and it lies in obscurity; and if not in obscurity then in isolation, which is not the same thing. If it is not found in isolation, then it lies in silence, which is not the same as isolation. If it is not found in silence then it lies in speaking only beneficial words, which is not the same as silence.

If you wish to be safe, do not get into arguments or disputes. If someone says, "Me", reply, "You." If he says, "Mine", reply,

i The formula recited by pilgrims throughout the Hajj.

ii The Sacred Mosque that houses the Ka'ba.

"Yours." Safety lies in shedding convention, which in turn lies in resigning your will, which in turn lies in forsaking any claim to knowledge in favor of that which God finds best as regards the management of your affairs. God says, *Does God not suffice His servant?* (Qur'ān 39:36); *He directs the Command from heaven to earth* (Qur'ān 32:5).

Isolation

Anyone practicing isolation requires ten things. He must know truth from falsehood. He must be ascetic. He must prefer hardship to ease. He must know how to take advantage of seclusion and safety. He must be farsighted. He must see others as superior to himself. He must keep his evil away from other people. He must always be engaged in some action or other; the devil makes work for idle hands. He must not take selfish pride in his situation. He must rid his home of any excess; for disciples, this means more than what is needed for the day at hand; for gnostics, it means more than what is needed for the present moment. He must cut himself off from anything that would cut him off from God Most High.

The Messenger of God ﷺ told Ḥudhayfa ibn al-Yamān,ⁱ "Become part of the furniture in your home" (Abū Dāwūd 4262). Jesus son of Mary ﷺ said, "Control your tongue, and let your home be enough to hold you. Accord to your soul the status of a ferocious predator or a scorching fire. People used to be leaves without thorns, but they have become thorns without leaves. They used to be healing cures, but they have become incurable diseases."

Dāwūd al-Ṭā'īⁱⁱ was asked, "How is it with you, that you do not mix with people?" He replied, "Why should I mix with those

i A prominent Companion of the Prophet ﷺ from whom many important hadiths are related (d. 36/656).

ii A renowned Sufi master of Kūfa (d. ca. 163/780).

who would study my flaws—elders without good character, youths without respect? One who feels at ease with God will feel ill at ease anywhere else.”

Al-Fuḍayl [ibn ‘Iyād]ⁱ said, “If you can put yourself in a place where you know no one, and no one knows you, then do so.” Sulaymān [al-Dārānī]ⁱⁱ said, “My desire in this world is to wear a cloak and to be in a town where no one knows me, without lunch or dinner.”

The Messenger of God ﷺ said, “There will come a time when holding onto one’s religion will be like gripping hot coals. Anyone who manages to do so will have the reward of fifty such as you [Companions].”

Isolation protects the body, frees up time for the heart, relinquishes one’s claims over other people, closes the doors to the world, breaks Satan’s weapon, and causes one’s outer and inner being to flourish.

Worship

Fulfill what is obligatory first. If you do so, you have done your part. The purpose of additional voluntary worship is to protect what is obligatory. As your worship increases, you must grow in gratitude and fear. Yaḥyā ibn Mu‘ādhⁱⁱⁱ said, “I find it strange to see people seeking extra merit while neglecting their obligations. If a debtor gives his creditor a gift equal in value to what he owes, he must still repay his debt when it is due.” Abū Bakr al-Warrāq^{iv} said, “These days, four things are given undue precedence: extra

i An early Muslim sage and ascetic (d. 187/803).

ii A celebrated and much-quoted Sufi of Damascus (d. ca. 215/830).

iii A much-quoted Persian Sufi sage (d. 257/871).

iv A Sufi master and author from Khorasan (d. 280/893).

acts over obligatory ones, outward things over inward ones, [the faults of] other people over [those of] oneself, and talk over action."

Contemplation

Contemplate God's Words, *Has there ever been for man a span of time when he was a thing unmentioned?* (Qur'ān 76:1). Consider your situation and the world as you know it: has it ever endured for anyone? The time that has passed and the time that remains are like two drops of water. The Messenger of God ﷺ said, "Nothing remains of this world but trial and tribulation." Noah ؑ was asked, "How did you find the world, you who lived longer than any other Prophet?" He replied, "Like a house with two doors: I entered through one, and exited through the other." Contemplation is the father of all goodness. It is a mirror that shows you good and evil.

Here ends this treatise, by the grace and aid of God. All praise be to Him alone.



Shaykh Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Sākin says in *Dalīl al-ṭālib ilā nihāyat al-maṭālib*:ⁱ

If the aspiring seeker wishes to don the patched cloak, he must first remove the garment that he wears in his ordinary life. The best material for a Sufi to wear is wool (*ṣūf*), since that is where they get their name. It is said that the first people to wear wool were Adam and Eve, and that Moses, Jesus, and John all wore wool, upon them all be peace. Our Prophet ﷺ, the noblest of Prophets, used to wear a cloak whose value was five dirhams. Wool is to be

i This passage was apparently added by a copyist and is included in some editions of the *Rasā'il*. I have not been able to find any further information on Ibn al-Sākin or his book.

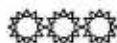
worn only by those who are purified (*ṣafā*) from the soul's turbidity. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, "I have been told that the Prophet ﷺ said, 'Do not wear wool unless your hearts are pure.'" The one who wears wool deceitfully will be divested of it by the Lord of Heaven.

Once the disciple dons wool, he must fulfill the duties of its three letters: *Ṣād*, *Wāw*, and *Fā'*. The duties of the *Ṣād* are truthfulness (*ṣidq*), purity (*ṣafā*), caution (*ṣiyāna*), patience (*ṣabr*), and righteousness (*ṣalāh*). The duties of the *Wāw* are connection (*waṣla*), fidelity (*wafā*), and ecstasy (*wajd*). The duties of the *Fā'* are joy (*farah*) and mental anguish (*tafajju'*).

When he dons the patched cloak (*muraqqa'a*), he must likewise fulfill the rights of its four letters: *Mīm*, *Rā'*, *Qāf*, and *'Ayn*. The rights of the *Mīm* are gnosis (*ma'rifa*), struggle (*mujāhada*), and humility (*madhalla*). The rights of the *Rā'* are mercy (*rahma*), compassion (*ra'fa*), discipline (*riyāda*), and solace (*rāha*). The rights of the *Qāf* are contentment (*qanā'a*), nearness (*qurba*), strength (*quwwa*), and true speech (*qawl ṣidq*). The rights of the *'Ayn* are knowledge (*'ilm*), action (*'amal*), love (*'ishq*), and servitude (*'ubūdiyya*) [to God].

The Prophet ﷺ enjoined the wearing of the patched cloak when he said to 'Ā'isha رضي الله عنها, "The way for you to join me is to beware of sitting with the dead;ⁱ and do not replace a garment until you have patched it."

God knows best.



ⁱ Meaning those who do not remember God.

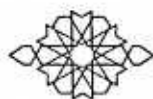




THE MEADOW OF SEEKERS

Rawḍat al-ṭālibīn





*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Praise be to God, who sets the hearts of His saints ablaze with the fire of His love and fills their aspirations and spirits with yearning to meet Him and behold Him. He confines their sights and insights to witnessing the beauty of His Presence until they become drunk on the breeze of the spirit of connection, and their hearts are bewildered by the vision of His beauty and awesomeness, so that they see nothing in this life or the Next but Him. Whatever forms may appear to their eyes, their insights behold only the Maker of Form. If they hear a pleasant melody, their inner beings turn directly to the Beloved. Whatever sound they may hear, be it provoking, enrapturing, saddening, disturbing, arousing, or enticing, they are provoked only towards Him, enraptured only by Him, disturbed only for Him, saddened only in Him, enticed only to what is with Him, aroused only toward Him. Their attention is focused solely on Him, and they listen only to Him; for their eyes and ears are closed to all others. These are the ones whom He has chosen as His saints from among His elect. May God bless the one whom He sent with His message, and his Family and Companions, the leaders of truth, and give them abundant peace.

Now to proceed: I have written this book to provide seekers of truth with something to assist them on their journey to God. I seek God's help and protection from error, for He is the best adviser and helper. I ask Him to bring benefit through it, for He is Near and answers prayers. I have named it *Rawḍat al-tālibin wa 'umdat al-sālikin* (The Meadow of Seekers and the Mainstay of Travelers). First let us begin with an introduction to the book.

Know that God's creatures are separated from Him because of their engrossment in His creation and their own souls, their regard for their deeds, and their deviations from correct doctrine. This is the result of their varying caprices, with which all human souls are endowed. They love status, wealth, the world, leadership, and fame. They entertain long-term hopes and are marked by procrastination, stinginess, desire, and self-satisfaction. They sustain themselves with corrupt food, drink, and clothing. Their worldly lives are corrupt, and self-centered passions dominate their hearts. When the struggle against the soul is abandoned and neglected, the soul's passions and its desire for comfort and status rise up. It takes on base traits such as rancor, pettiness, envy, ignorance, foolishness, ostentation, and hypocrisy. It utilizes its body parts—the eyes, the ears, the tongue, the hands, and the feet—for things other than obedience to God Most High. *All of those will be called to account for* (Qur'ān 17:36). This results in laziness, stupidity, heedlessness, and other faults that distance one from God.

Engrossment in creation and [the desires of] the soul veils one from God, and paying regard to one's actions is idolatry. This is because it is God Most High Who creates His servants' actions and brings them into existence, and all they do is acquire them; and they are then rewarded for obedience and punished for disobedience. "Acquisition" (*kasb*) means to become attached to something that the Divine Power brings into existence. That is the doctrine of the Sunnis. The individual's potential comes into play the moment the

deed is performed, not before it; when he performs the deed, God creates for him the ability to do it, and this is called "acquisition". Those who attribute both the will and the acquisition to themselves are called Qadaris; those who attribute neither to themselves are called Jabaris; those who attribute the will to God and the acquisition to themselves are the rightly-guided Sunni Sufis. This is a [subject fit for] lengthy discussion, but here is not the place for it. We will discuss it further later, God willing.

Deviation from sound doctrine is the result of vain desires dominating the heart, and of fanatical devotion to heretical teachings. One of the imams said that some people will be saved by their doctrines despite having few [good] deeds to their names, while others will be damned by their doctrines despite having many [good] deeds.

Love for status and wealth is a deadly poison. Leadership and fame give rise to pride and worldliness, which ruin one's religion. Someone once said, "If ever I did a good deed and other people witnessed it, I considered it void."

Placing too much stock in hope causes a person to neglect righteous action and stray from the truth. Procrastination is one of the Devil's greatest soldiers. Stinginess, vain desire, and self-satisfaction are ruinous ailments.

Sustaining oneself with corrupt nourishment causes the heart to become darkened and hard, and distances one from God. Wholesome nourishment does just the opposite. God says, Exalted is He, *O you who believe, eat of the good things We have provided you with* (Qur'an 2:172); "good" here means "lawful". Make your food and drink goodly, and it will not harm you if you do not fast all day and pray all night. Eating wholesome food is a major principle of spiritual life. You may stand all night in prayer like a pillar, but it will not do you any good unless you are aware of what you put in your stomach. The quickest to pass over the Bridge to Paradise

will be those who were most scrupulous in the world. God says, Mighty and Majestic is He: "My servant, be hungry and you will see Me; be scrupulous and you will know Me; be abstinent and you will reach Me." He also says, "I would be ashamed to punish those who are scrupulous."

One of the great masters said, "Seek knowledge, hunger, obscurity, and fasting. Knowledge is light to guide you; hunger is wisdom;" —Abū Yazīd [al-Baṣṭāmī]ⁱ said, "Whenever I spend a day hungry for God's sake, I find a new door to wisdom opening in my heart" —"obscurity is peace and wellbeing; fasting is a divine quality like nothing else, for God says, *Nothing is like unto Him* (Qur'ān 42:11)." Adorning oneself with this quality leads to knowledge, gnosis, and witnessing. God says [in a Sacred Hadith], "Every deed of the son of Adam is his, except fasting; that is Mine, and it is I who give the reward for it" (Bukhārī 5927). The change in a fasting person's breath is more fragrant to God than musk.

Engrossment in the world and the dominance of passions over the heart give rise to all blameworthy qualities. Until these qualities are replaced by virtuous ones, there can be no hope of drawing nearer to God. Someone said, "As long as a servant is tarnished by other [concerns], he is not fit for closeness to or sitting with [God] until he purifies his heart from all besides." [The Caliph] 'Uthmān ra said, "If hearts were pure, they would never have their fill of reciting the Qur'ān." This is because it is through purity that the heart ascends to witnessing the One Who is speaking and no other.

i A celebrated Persian Sufi (d. ca. 261/874), especially noted for his 'intoxicated' states and utterances.

Everything Besides God Is a Veil From Him

Were it not for the darkness of the world, the light of the Unseen would shine plainly. If not for the mischief of the soul, the veils would be lifted. If not for obstructions, realities would be laid bare. If not for causality, the Divine Power would be directly manifest. If not for greed, love would be ascendant. If not for nagging self-regard, the spirit would burst into flames of yearning. If not for distance, the Lord would be beheld. When the veil is lifted, all these obstructions, attachments, and illusions of causality are dispelled.

A secret has appeared to you which was long hidden from you;
A morning has shone out; the darkness before it was you.
It was you who veiled the heart from the secret of its mystery;
But for you, its seal would never have been impressed on you.
If you quit [the seal], this secret will dwell within you,
Its tent pitched on the secure uplands of unveiling.
Then comes a discourse of which ears never tire,
And whose prose and verse are delectable to us!

Someone said that when God desires ill for someone, He closes to him the door of action and opens to him the door of indolence. Yet a man came to Mu'adh ibn Jabal and asked about someone who performs many good deeds and commits few sins but has weak certainty and is often troubled by doubts. Mu'adh replied, "His doubt will cancel out his deeds." The man then asked about someone who does few good deeds and commits many sins, but has strong certainty. Mu'adh was silent. The man said, "By God, if the doubt of the former canceled out his deeds, then the certainty of the latter must cancel out his sins." Mu'adh took him by the hand and said, "I have never met anyone more perceptive than this fellow!"

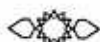


Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī رحمہ اللہ said, "For twelve years I was the blacksmith of my soul; for five, I polished the mirror of my heart; for one year I looked between them, and around my waist I found the unbeliever's belt.ⁱ For five years I worked to find a way to cut it off, until at last this was revealed to me, and I looked upon mankind and saw that they were dead, and prayed a fourfold *takbir* over them."

What this means—and God knows best—is that he worked to struggle against his soul and remove the impurities and dross that contaminated it: pride, self-satisfaction, avarice, rancor, envy, and the other habits of the soul. This he did by plunging his soul into the furnace of fear and pounding it with the hammer of the Divine Command, until he reached the limits of his endurance. With this, he thought that it was at last purified. Then he looked into the mirror of his heart's sincerity, and saw that there were still subtle remnants of idolatry in it: ostentation, regard for deeds, expectation of reward and punishment, and ambition for spiritual gifts and miracles. The spiritual elect recognize this as idolatry, and this was the unbeliever's belt of which he spoke. So he endeavored to cut it off: that is, to cut off his soul and wean it from all attachments to creation, until he killed that part of his soul that was alive and revived that part of his soul that was dead. He became firmly grounded in witnessing eternity, and recognized the nothingness of all besides God. Then he said a fourfold *takbir*, a funeral prayer, for all of humanity, corresponding to the four things that veil man from God: the soul, vain desire, Satan, and the world. He slew his soul and vain desire, rejected Satan and the world, and said

i The *zunnār*, the belt traditionally worn by non-Muslim citizens of the Caliphate.

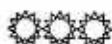
"God is Greater" to each of them as they disappeared; for God is Greatest, and everything besides Him is lesser.



Now, know that you cannot reach the stations of nearness to God without first traversing six stages. The first is to wean the limbs and organs from infringements of Sacred Law. The second is to wean the soul from familiar habits. The third is to wean the heart from human frivolities. The fourth is to wean the innermost secret from pollutants of [one's own] nature. The fifth is to wean the spirit from the fumes of sense-perception. The sixth is to wean the intellect from delusions of the imagination.

Traversing the first stage causes springs of wisdom to well up in the heart. The second leads one to the secrets of God-given knowledge. The third allows one to glimpse the intimate discourse that is convened in the Angelic Realm. In the fourth, the lights of the stations of Divine Proximity shine. In the fifth, the moons of adoration are beheld. The sixth leads one down to the meadows of the Holy Presence. Then, as you behold the subtleties of intimacy [with the Divine], you become oblivious to the dense objects of the material world. When God chooses to make you one of His elect, He gives you to drink from the cup of His love, which only makes you thirstier and deepens your longing to draw ever nearer to Him. This drink will take hold of you and draw you into drunken bewilderment. Now you are a *murīd*, a seeker; but as your bewilderment deepens, He will take you from yourself and divest you of your identity, so that you are no longer the *murīd* but are the *murād*, the one who is sought. Your essence will be annihilated and your attributes erased, so that even as you subsist through Him you will be unaware of your own annihilation. He will clothe you in the garb of "and then it is through Me that he

hears, and through Me that he sees." He will become your Director and your Guardian. When you speak, it will be in remembrance of Him. When you see, it will be through His lights. When you move, it will be by His power. When you strike, it will be by His ordinance. Duality will pass away, and distinction will become inconceivable. When you attain mastery and stability in the midst of this intoxication, you will say, "He." When you are overcome with ecstasy and pass beyond the limits of stability, you will say, "You." In the former state you are stable; in the latter, you are variable. This is an enigma that is difficult for the mind to solve.





CHAPTER I

THE PILLARS OF THE RELIGION

The two brief phrases of the Testimony of Faith, "There is no god but God" and "Muḥammad is the Messenger of God", comprise an affirmation of the divine Essence, Attributes, and Acts, and an affirmation of the truthfulness of the Messenger ﷺ. Faith is built upon the following four pillars:

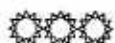
The first pillar is knowledge regarding the Essence of God. This has ten fundamental principles, which are: that God exists; that He is beginningless and endless; that He is not a substance, body, or accident; that He is not confined by a particular direction or contained in a place; that He can be seen; and that He is One.

The second pillar is knowledge of the Attributes of God. This also has ten fundamental principles, which are that God is endowed with life, knowledge, power, will, hearing, sight, and speech; that He is truthful in communicating; that He is transcendent beyond incarnation in temporal things; and that His attributes are eternal.

The third pillar is knowledge of the Acts of God. This also has ten fundamental principles, which are that the deeds of mankind are created by God, willed by God, and acquired by Him; that He created out of His own free will; that He is able to command a creature beyond its ability; that He is able to cause pain to the

innocent; that He is not obliged to do what is best [by human standards]; that nothing is obligatory unless His Law says so; that it was rationally possible for Him to send the Prophets, may God bless them and give them peace; and that it is a certain fact that He sent our Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and aided him with miracles.

The fourth pillar concerns matters known by Revelation alone. This also has ten fundamental principles, which are: the Resurrection, the interrogation by Munkar and Nakīr, the punishment in the grave, the Scales, the Bridge, the creation of Paradise and Hell, the laws of the Imamate, the merit of the Companions in the order of their succession, and the preconditions of the Imamate.ⁱ



i The last two items on this list are not found in *Rawḍat al-tālibīn* here, but have been supplied in the translation from the otherwise identical passage in *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 1/105.



CHAPTER 2

THE MEANING OF GOOD CONDUCT (ADAB)

It is related that the Prophet ﷺ said, "My Lord taught me good conduct, and taught me well."ⁱ Good conduct means refining one's inner and outer being. One who accomplishes this is a true Sufi. When someone faithfully adheres to the conduct of the Sunna, God illuminates his heart with the light of gnosis. There is no nobler station than emulating the Prophet ﷺ in all his injunctions, actions, and ethics, and adorning oneself with his conduct in all matters of speech, action, belief, and intention.

The sincere bond between God and His servant lies in three things: seeking help, effort, and good conduct. The servant for his part seeks help, and God for His part grants it. The effort comes from the servant, and success from God. The servant maintains good conduct, and God bestows nobility. Whoever practices the conduct of the righteous is fit for the carpet of nobility; that of the saints, for the carpet of proximity; that of the folk of true faith, for the carpet of beholding; and that conduct of the Prophets, for the carpet of intimate friendship and rapture.

i Not classed as a *ṣaḥīḥ* (rigorously authenticated) hadith, but accepted as correct and valid in its meaning.

To be deprived of good conduct is to be deprived of all goodness. If a person will not be disciplined by the injunctions and mentoring of the spiritual masters, he will not deign to adhere to the conduct of the Qur'ān or Sunna either. If someone cannot hold to the conduct of the beginners, how can he hope to lay claim to the stations of the advanced? The one who does not know God will not advance towards Him, and the one who does not conform to His commands and prohibitions will be far removed from good conduct.

The proper conduct of service is to lose oneself in it entirely while being oblivious to it, and beholding [only] the One Who brings it to pass. A person may reach Paradise through his [acts of] obedience [to God], but it is through his good conduct that he reaches God. Realization of Unity (*tawḥīd*) requires faith and cannot exist without it; faith in turn requires obedience to the Sacred Law; and obedience requires good conduct. Thus anyone who is bereft of good conduct is bereft of obedience, faith, and realization of Unity. Poor conduct entails expulsion; anyone who has poor conduct while on the carpet [of closeness] will be banished to the doorway, and anyone who has poor conduct at the doorway will be banished from there to taking care of animals.

The most beneficial principles of good conduct are profound religious understanding, asceticism in the world, and knowledge of one's duties to God. If a gnostic were to neglect good conduct with the Object of his gnosis, he would join the ranks of the doomed.

It is said that there are three traits that prevent one from becoming spiritually estranged: avoiding dubious (or doubting) people (*ahl al-rayb*), observing good conduct, and doing no harm.

The good conduct of religious-minded people consists chiefly of refining the soul, restraining the body, keeping within the bounds of the Law, and non-indulgence of the appetites. The good conduct of the spiritual elite consists chiefly of purifying the heart,

keeping secrets, fulfilling covenants, giving the present moment its due, disregarding intrusive thoughts, maintaining proper courtesy throughout the stages of the spiritual quest, and constant presence of heart and mind. Whoever conquers his soul by means of good conduct can truly be said to worship God with sincerity. Some say that this is the true meaning of certitude.

It is said that God says, "When I bring someone into the presence of My Names and Attributes, I impose good conduct upon him. If someone desires to unveil the reality of My Essence, I impose ruin upon him." Choose, then, which you would prefer—good conduct, or ruin! If anyone fails to observe correct conduct with the moment (*waqt*), his moment will transform into spite (*maqt*). When the disciple fails to show good conduct, he will be sent back to whence he came.

It is related that Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Salāmⁱ said, "Once I was in Mecca, sitting by the Ka'ba with my legs stretched out, when 'Ā'isha al-Makkiyya, who was one of the gnostic women, approached me and said, 'Abū 'Ubayd, you are well-known to be a man of knowledge. Allow me to tell you something: have good manners when you sit with Him, or else He may erase your name from the register of those near to Him.'"

Someone said, "Maintain good conduct inwardly as well as outwardly, for poor outward conduct leads to bad outward consequences, and poor inward conduct leads to bad inward consequences."

Conduct means bringing what lies in one's potential and character out into the open. When a person has good conduct, he brings out the righteous trait that was within him. This trait is the work of God, and the human being cannot make it for himself. It is

i A scholar who wrote on a number of branches of learning but is best known as a philologist (d. ca. 223/838).

akin to how flint has within it the potential to make fire. The act is God's alone, but bringing it into the open is the human being's acquisition. Thus all aspects of good conduct spring from righteous traits and divine gifts. God prepares the inner beings of the Sufis by perfecting these traits within them, and then they actualize these traits by means of spiritual discipline, which brings God's creation into open manifestation. With this, they become people of refinement and good character.

The Conduct of the People of Divine Presenceⁱ

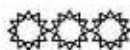
All aspects of good conduct are received from the Messenger of God ﷺ, in whom they are all combined both inwardly and outwardly. God Almighty tells us of the Prophet's ﷺ conduct in the Divine Presence: *The eye did not waver, nor did it stray* (Qur'ān 53:17). This is an exceedingly profound level of conduct with which the Prophet ﷺ was especially blessed. In this verse God tells us of how totally upright his blessed heart was, and how he focused exclusively on God and turned away from all besides Him. He left behind him not only the earth and the trifles of the ephemeral world, but the delights of the heavens and the Hereafter too, and did so without regret. God says, *That you may not grieve for what escapes you* (Qur'ān 57:23), which is addressed to all. *The eye did not waver*, conversely, tells us of the Prophet's ﷺ state and special situation vis-à-vis this universal address. His eye did not waver in the slightest as he left all that behind, nor did it waver when he proceeded forward to receive what came to him there in the station of *two bows' length away* (Qur'ān 53:9), in spirit and heart. He then fled from God in shyness and awe of Him, and confined his

i This passage is found verbatim in Chapter 32 of Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar al-Suhrawardī's *Awārif al-Ma'ārif*, one of the classic textbooks of Sufism.

soul in poverty and humility, lest his soul become too expansive and stray; for it is in the nature of the soul to stray when it deems itself enriched: *Nay, truly man is insolent when he thinks himself free of need* (Qur'ān 96:6-7). When gifts are bestowed upon the spirit and the heart, the soul attempts to steal a listen; but if it receives gifts of its own, it begins to deem itself enriched and becomes insolent. This insolence manifests in excessive expansiveness, which closes the door to further gifts. The soul simply does not have the room to contain such gifts.

Hence when Moses  was in the Divine Presence, he achieved one half of this; his eye did not waver to steal a glance at what he left behind him or mourn its loss, for he maintained good conduct. However, when he was filled with those precious gifts, and his soul stole a listen and aspired to gifts of its own, it began to feel enriched and was overwhelmed by what came to it. In its expansiveness, it crossed the line and cried out [to God], *Show me, so that I may look upon You!* (Qur'ān 7:143). Having been unable to be patient and steadfast, he was deprived of more; and this shows the difference between [God's] Beloved and [God's] Interlocutor, may peace and blessings be upon them both.

Sahl ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Tustarī said, "The Messenger of God  did not turn towards what his soul beheld, nor did he behold himself at all, but witnessed his Lord with his entire being. He witnessed the Attributes that were shown to him then, and this made him stable." If you reflect on what this implies, you will find that it conforms with what we have just said. God knows best.



i Sahl (d. ca. 283/896) was one of the most learned and often-quoted early Persian Sufi masters.



CHAPTER 3

THE MEANING OF WAYFARING AND SUFISM

Wayfaring (*sulūk*) means the refinement of character, action, and knowledge, and being engaged in cultivating one's inner and outer being. Technically all of these things are distractions from God, but the one who engages in them is purifying his inner being to prepare it for reaching Him. The wayfarer's journey may be spoiled in two ways: by contriving excuses to take advantage of relaxed legal rulings, and by imitating the ways of errant people who pursue their base passions. Anyone who squanders the demands of the present moment is an ignoramus; anyone who is lax in them is heedless; anyone who neglects them is useless.

The disciple's intention is not sound until his interior monologue is fixed upon God and His Messenger and his days are spent in fasting and silence; for too much food, talk, and sleep cause the heart to harden. His back must be bent in obeisance, his forehead pressed to the ground in prostration, his eyes brimming with tears, his heart mournful, and his tongue busy with invocation. In sum, his entire body and being must be engrossed in some task that God and His Messenger commend, and he must avoid all that God and His Messenger detest. He must be scrupulous and abandon his vain desires altogether. He must acknowledge all the

favors that God has granted him. He must strive to do all this in a spirit of hopefulness, rather than treating it as labor in exchange for remuneration; it must be worship, not habit. As long as he keeps in mind the One for Whom his work is done, he will pay no regard to the work itself. He must relinquish his own desires, for true spiritual intention means renouncing one's choice and being content to let fate unfold, as a poet said:

I want to reach Him, but He wants to keep me away;
So I give up my desire for that which He desires.

Become annihilated to humankind by God's decree, to your own desire by God's command, and to your own will by God's act; and then you will be fit to serve as a repository for God's knowledge. The sign that you are annihilated to humankind is that you become detached from them, cease inclining towards them, and cease to covet what they possess.

The sign that you are annihilated to yourself and your desire is that you cease to participate in conscious acquisition, or to attach yourself to means of causality, whether to attract benefit or repel harm. You no longer move on your own for your own sake, or rely on yourself, defend yourself, or harm yourself. Instead, you trust that the One Who undertook to set all this in motion in the first place will be the One to assume control of it, just as you left it all to Him when you were in your mother's womb or an infant in the cradle.

The sign that you are annihilated to your will in God's act is that you do not will anything at all, for you have no interest in any will but God's will. His act flows through you, and so you yourself are His will and His act. With a still body, a tranquil heart, an expanded breast, an illuminated face, and a thriving inner being, you turn about in the Divine Decree, as the voice of fate calls to

you and your Lord teaches you, clothes you in His Light, and leads you through the stations of the wise ones who preceded you.

The Requirements of Self-Isolation

The spiritual wayfarer must isolate himself if he is to gain victory over his foes. There are two kinds of self-isolation (*'uzla*): that which is obligatory, and that which is voluntary. Obligatory self-isolation is to isolate oneself from evil things and evil people. Voluntary self-isolation is to isolate oneself from frivolity and frivolous people. Some say that *khalwa* (solitude) and *'uzla* are not synonyms, and that *khalwa* means to isolate oneself from others, while *'uzla* means to isolate oneself from oneself and all one's desires, and busy oneself with God alone. It is said that peace is nine parts silence and one part isolation. Likewise it has been said that wisdom is nine parts silence except when necessary, and one part isolation from other people. How often we come to regret things we say—and how rarely do we regret keeping silent! It is said that solitude is our original state and company is an intrusion into it, and so it is best to adhere to the origin and only mix with people when we must. And when we do mix with people, we should keep silent, for that too is the ordinal state:

If in your time just one person were true to you,
That's all one could wish for; but where is that one?

Others say that solitude is in the heart, and that you can become entirely engrossed with God and keep a constant vigil to Him in your heart, so enraptured by Him that it is as though you were standing before Him.

The first stage of wayfaring, it is said, is to engage in frequent and powerful invocation with the heart and the tongue, until this

invocation becomes enmeshed with your flesh and blood and then moves to the heart, so that even when the tongue falls silent the heart continues to say, *Allāh, Allāh* inwardly without your being conscious of it. Then your heart becomes still, and you remain constantly aware of the One you seek, engrossed in Him, enraptured by Him, contemplating Him. Your vision of Him becomes so intense that you forget yourself and become totally annihilated, as though you are in the presence of *Whose is Sovereignty this day? God's, the One, the All-Vanquishing!* (Qur'ān 40:16). It is then that God discloses Himself to your heart, bewildering and intoxicating you with His Glory and Majesty, so that you have no room left in you for anything but the supreme Object of your quest. "The people of presence need only look upon Him," as they say. It is said, regarding the Words of God Most High *By the witness and the witnessed* (Qur'ān 85:3), that the witness is God and the witnessed is the reflection of the eternal Divine Beauty; He is both Witnesser and Witnessed.

Spiritual Struggleⁱ

Dear friend, close your eyes and look. What do you see? If you answer that you see nothing, you are surely mistaken, for indeed you can see something. But the shadow of your own existence is clouding your insight, and so you cannot find Him. If you wish to find Him and see Him in front of you though your eyes are closed, you must shrink down your existence a little, or move away from it a little. The way to do this is to engage in spiritual struggle, the struggle to dispel all that is other-than-God, or to slay all that is

ⁱ This entire section of the text is found verbatim in the *Fawā'id al-jamāl* of the Central Asian Sufi shaykh Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 618/1221), ed. Youssef Zeidan (Kuwait: Dār Sa'ād al-Ṣabāḥ, 1993), pp. 122-126.

other-than-God. What is other-than-God? Existence, the soul, and Satan.

There are several ways to engage in this struggle. The first is to gradually decrease one's intake of food, because existence, the soul, and Satan all draw their nourishment from food. If it is decreased, their power abates.

The second way is to renounce one's free will and replace it with the will of the trusted spiritual master, who will choose for one what is best. This means to put oneself in the position of a child who has not yet reached manhood, or that of a simpleton who cannot look after himself. Such people require some kind of adviser, guardian, judge, or ruler to manage their affairs.

The third way is the path of Junayd, may God sanctify his spirit, which has eight requirements: constant ritual purity; constant fasting; constant silence; constant solitude; constant invocation of *Lā ilāha illā Allāh* (There is no god but God); constant attachment of the heart to the spiritual master and submission to his direction; constant suppression of intrusive thoughts; and constant abstinence from objecting to God's decree for one, whether it spell harm or benefit, even ceasing to ask Him for Paradise or to seek refuge from Hell.

In the station of witnessing (*mushāhada*), there is a distinction between existence, the soul, and Satan. Existence is very dark in the beginning, but as it begins to clear it comes to resemble a black cloud. If it is the throne of Satan, then it is red; but as it is rectified and sheds selfish interests while retaining duties, it clears and becomes white like a rain-cloud. When the soul appears, it is blue like the sky, and shimmers like water pouring from a spring. If it is the throne of Satan, it is like spring of darkness and fire, and flows weakly; for there is no goodness in Satan. The water of the soul flows upon existence, determining what sprouts from its soil. If the soul is purified, it pours goodness upon it, and goodness

sprouts from it. If it pours evil upon it, evil sprouts from it. Satan is made of fire mingled with the shadows of unbelief to make an immense form. He may appear before you like a tall black man with a dreadful aura, rushing at you as if he means to get inside you. If you wish to be free from him, say in your heart, "O Rescuer of those who cry for help, rescue us!", and then he will run away from you.

Sufism

The way of the Sufi is to make poverty his robe, patience his cloak, contentment his steed, and complete reliance [on God] his habit. He must suffice himself with God Almighty alone. He must employ his limbs in obedience, deny himself his passions, detach himself from the world, and divest himself of all aspects of self-interest. He should have no interest in the world at all unless it is unavoidable, in which case he should restrict himself to what is necessary and go no further. His heart must be free of impurities. The Sufi is aflame with love for his Lord, always inwardly fleeing to Him and seeking refuge with Him. He finds consolation in Him alone and no other, relying on Him alone and no other. In religious matters he is careful always to choose what is best, most important, and most prudent. He always puts God first.

Sufism means to throw the soul into total servanthood and attach the heart to [the Divine] Lordship. It has also been defined as the art of concealing needs and repelling flaws. Sahl ibn 'Abd Allāh said, "The Sufi is he who is purified (*ṣafā*) of turbidity and filled with contemplation, and to whom gold is no more valuable than clay."

Others say Sufism is to purify the heart from the company of people, to shed natural traits, to suppress human qualities, to avoid

psychic impulses, to adopt spiritual qualities, to attach oneself to true knowledge, and to follow the law of the Messenger of God ﷺ.

Someone has said that the Sufi is the one who is always engaged in purification: he purifies each present moment from imperfections by cleansing the heart of the imperfections of the soul. In this he is assisted by constant awareness of his neediness before his Lord, which allows him to identify his soul's imperfections. Whenever his soul becomes agitated it reveals one of its attributes. He discerns this attribute with his penetrating insight, and flees to his Lord. He is constantly purifying his total being and identifying his soul's weaknesses and imperfections. He stands upright over his heart with the help of his Lord, and over his soul with the help of his heart. God says, *O you who believe, be upright before God, witness in equity* (Qur'ān 5:8). This is the true meaning of Sufism.



Sufism is rooted in consuming only what is lawful, and emulating the Messenger of God ﷺ in his character traits, actions, commands, and practices. A true Sufi master must memorize the Qur'ān and write down hadiths, for this science is governed by the Qur'ān and Sunna. Following this path is a matter of piety and God-consciousness, not extravagant claims.

The beginning of Sufism is knowledge, the middle is action, and the end is purely a gift. Knowledge reveals the goal, action facilitates seeking it, and the gift allows the ultimate hope to be attained.

There are three levels of Sufis: the aspiring disciple, the intermediate wayfarer, and the advanced arrival. The disciple seeks to master the present moment; the intermediate experiences spiritual states; and the arrival attains certitude. The best thing for all of them is to count their breaths and make the most of the present moment. The disciple's station is that of struggle and strenuous

discipline; he must undergo discomfort and forgo self-interest, giving his soul no leeway. The intermediate must endure all manner of terrors in the pursuit of his goal, and maintain always an attitude of truthfulness and good conduct as he proceeds through the spiritual stations, and behave appropriately in each of them; for he will experience variegation as he moves from one state to the next, always in increase. The end of the path is the station of sobriety and stability, where the arrival finally answers God's summons after traversing all the intermediate stages. Here he is stable, unchanged by terrors and unaffected by ephemeral states. It makes no difference to him whether he experiences difficulty or ease, fortune or privation, cruelty or kindness. He feels the same whether he eats or goes hungry, whether he sleeps or stays awake. All of his self-interests have passed away, leaving only his rights and duties. Outwardly he is with other people, while inwardly he is with God. All of this was true of the Prophet ﷺ. If such a man were tied to a stake atop the highest peak in the world, and winds were to blow upon him from all sides, not a hair on his head would be moved.

It is said that they are called Sufis because they are in the front row (*saff*) before God. Their aspirations are lofty, their hearts are devoted to God, and their innermost beings are standing before Him.

The Malāmatisⁱ

A Malāmātī does not display any good, nor harbor any evil. What this means is that sincerity has become instilled in the Malāmātī's flesh and blood, so that he does not wish for anyone to see his state or know of his deeds. The Malāmatis are so concerned with

i This passage is a verbatim abridgement of Chapter 8 of Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar al-Suhrawardī's *Awārif al-Ma'ārif*.

sincerity that they strive to conceal all of their spiritual states; they even delight in this concealment. If anyone were to discover their righteous deeds, they would be as horrified as a sinner is when someone discovers his sins. The Malāmātī reveres the eminent place and position of sincerity and holds fast to it, relying upon it. The Sufi, however, is not even aware of his own sincerity.

Abū Yūsuf al-Sūsīⁱ said, "When a Sufi notices his own sincerity, he feels the need to rise to a higher level of sincerity so that he may no longer notice it."

Another Sufi said, "True sincerity is to overlook other people altogether because one is totally engrossed in God. The Malāmātī is aware of other people, which is why he hides his true nature from them."

Ja'far al-Khuldīⁱⁱ said, "I asked Abū al-Qāsim al-Junaydⁱⁱⁱ the difference between sincerity (*ikhhlās*) and truthfulness (*ṣidq*). He replied, 'Truthfulness is the root that comes first, while sincerity is the branch that comes after. The reason they are different is that sincerity only comes into play once action has begun. There is sincerity (*ikhhlās*), and then there is the refinement (*mukhālāṣa*) of sincerity; and within that refinement lies a unique secret (*khālīṣa*).'" One could say that sincerity is the way of the Malāmātī, and refinement of sincerity the way of the Sufi. The unique secret in this refinement, the fruit of it, is to become annihilated to one's own self through beholding how its Sustainer sustains it; and indeed, to become unaware even of this sustenance. This is total immersion in the Source, and obliviousness to creation. It is deliverance from

i This may be a reference to a Sufi named Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf al-Sūsī, who is mentioned several times in al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*, and is quoted by that name in chapter 10 of the present work.

ii A well-known Sufi (d. 348/959–60) who was a disciple of Junayd al-Baghdādī (see below).

iii Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910) is one of the most renowned and influential authorities of Sufism.

the obscure mire of duality. It is for the Sufi to forget he is even a Sufi. The Malāmātī remains confined to the bounds of his sincerity, unaware of how to break free from it.

This illustrates the plain difference between the Malāmātī and the Sufi. The Malāmātī does hold to sincerity and truthfulness, but he still retains a remnant of awareness of humanity, even if only in the context of his quest for true sincerity. The Sufi is purified of this remnant and so pays regard neither to his deeds nor to humanity, having totally removed himself from them and left them behind him. He sees with the eye of annihilation, and has truly mastered [the realization of] unity. He bears witness to the mystery of *Everything is perishing but His Face* (Qur'ān 28:88). A Sufi once cried out in ecstasy, "There is nothing in either world but God!"

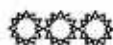
There are two possible attitudes a Malāmātī may have when concealing his state. One is that he conceals himself for the purpose of achieving true sincerity. The other, which is superior, is that he conceals himself from others in a jealous fashion, like a man who wishes to be alone with his beloved without anyone else seeing, and indeed without anyone even knowing of his love. This is a higher aspiration but would still be considered a blemish in the Sufi path. Thus the Malāmātī is ahead of the would-be Sufi (*mutaṣawwif*), but behind the true Sufi.

It is said that the Malāmātīs consider there to be four kinds of invocation: with the tongue, with the heart, with the innermost secret, and with the spirit. When the spirit invokes, the other three are silent; this is the invocation of witnessing. When the innermost secret invokes, the heart and the tongue are silent; this is the invocation of awe. When the heart invokes, the tongue is silent; this is the invocation of blessing and favor. If the heart is oblivious to invocation, the tongue will invoke; this is regular invocation. They also believe that each of these invocations has its own particular blight. The blight of the spirit's invocation is for the innermost

secret to be aware of it; the blight of the innermost secret's invocation is for the heart to be aware of it; the blight of the heart's invocation is for the soul to be aware of it; and the blight of the soul's invocation is for the soul to be aware of it and impressed by it and to expect reward for it, or to imagine that it will be enough to carry one upward through the spiritual stations.

The people whom the Malāmatis esteem the least are those who wish to be known and to have people flock to them on account of their spiritual advancement. The secret of this principle, upon which they have built their whole methodological school, is that the invocation of the spirit is the invocation of the [Divine] Essence; the invocation of the innermost secret is the invocation of the Attributes; the heart's invocation of blessing and favor is the invocation of the effects of the Attributes; and the invocation of the soul is exposed to defects. That is what they mean when they speak of the innermost secret being "aware of the spirit." For them, true annihilation comes with the invocation of the Essence, and to invoke the Attributes with awe at that moment would be to acknowledge one's own existence—for one cannot be awestruck unless one exists—which undermines true annihilation. In the same way, the innermost secret's invocation of the Attributes implies a sense of proximity, while the heart's invocation of blessing and favor implies a certain sense of distance, in that it amounts to regarding the gift and overlooking the Giver. Finally, the soul's fixation on compensation amounts to recognition of its own actions, which is certainly a defect.

Those, then, are the groups within this faction, some of which are superior to others. God knows best.





CHAPTER 4

THE MEANING OF ARRIVAL AND COMMUNION

Arrival (*wuṣūl*) is for the cloak to be lifted from God so that the servant [of God] becomes engrossed in Him, knowing nothing but God and aspiring to nothing but Him. He is totally immersed in His totality, through witnessing and concentration, and no longer pays any heed to his own soul and the question of adorning it outwardly with worship and inwardly with refined character. All of that is purification, which comes at the beginning, while the end is a matter of shedding the soul entirely and divesting oneself of all but Him, as though one were Him. That is the meaning of arrival; grasp this well.

The meaning of communion (*wiṣāl*) is to behold and witness with the innermost heart in this life, and with the eyes in the Hereafter. Communion does not mean a direct connection (*ittiṣāl*) between essence and essence, for God is entirely above such a notion. A poet said,

My eyesight is fixed to the vision of Him,
Though where He is be far from where I am.

The Sufi path is built upon four things: struggle (*ijtibād*), conduct (*ṣulūk*), wayfaring (*ṣayr*), and flying (*tayr*). Struggle, initiation, and wayfaring mean attaining realization of the truths of submission, faith, and spiritual excellence. Soaring means to be drawn, by Divine Generosity, to direct knowledge of God. Each of them follows and requires the other just as in order to pray one must first cleanse the body of impurities, then perform ablutions, then pray; and then comes flying, which is arrival; and God Most High knows best. This is the path of the wayfarers, and these are the stations of the travelers; and after that comes the path of arrival, which is flight. God knows best.

Connection

[Sufyān] al-Thawrī said, "Connection is the unveiling of the heart and the witnessing of secrets in the station of bewilderment." The spiritual masters speak of connection (*ittiṣāl* or *muwāṣala*): all who arrive at true certainty by the path of experiential tasting and ecstasy attain a certain level of arrival (*wuṣūl*). There are different degrees of this.

Some find God by way of the Acts, which is a level of divine self-disclosure, so that their deeds and all others disappear from their sight as they reach God, and they relinquish their self-direction and free will. This is a level of arrival.

Others halt in the station of awe and familiarity, basking in the Majesty and Beauty of God as it is unveiled to their hearts. This is divine self-disclosure by way of the Attributes, which is another level of arrival.

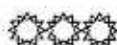
Others ascend to the station of annihilation, their inner beings filled with the lights of certainty and visions, so absorbed in this

i A much-revered jurist and sage (d. 161/778).

that they become oblivious to their own existence. This is a kind of self-disclosure of the Essence, given only to the spiritual elect, those nearest God. It also is another level of arrival.

Above this is the truth of certainty (*haqq al-yaqīn*), of which a glimpse may be given to the elect in this world; it is the flow of the light of witnessing through the servant's entire being, immersing his spirit, heart, soul, and even his body. This is the highest level of arrival.

When considering all this, one cannot help but conclude that one must be in the lowest station compared to these lofty ones. What, then, does it mean to speak of arrival? No, the journey is endless, and the stations stretch on one after another forever. One could never exhaust them in the Hereafter, let alone in this short earthly life. God knows best.





CHAPTER 5

THE MEANING OF REALIZATION OF DIVINE UNITY, GNOSIS, AND SOME OTHER TERMS

Realization of Divine Unity (*tawhīd*) means to distinguish the Eternal from the ephemeral, and then turn away from the ephemeral and towards the Eternal. This includes yourself, since you are ephemeral; you must not see yourself, never mind anything else, but only God. If you see yourself or anything else while affirming the oneness of God, then you are a ditheist, not a monotheist; you hold to two gods, not One. God is One in Essence and Attribute, and He is not in any way subject to the attributes of ephemerality: similarity, comparability, connection, separation, contrast, proximity, commingling, incarnation, exit, entrance, change, entropy, substitution, or relocation. His perfect beauty is flawless. The perfect beauty of His oneness is beyond the range of thought; the majesty of His eternal self-subsistence is beyond expression. Even the most eloquent cannot describe His glory; even the wisest cannot define His Essence. The senses cannot apprehend Him, nor can analogy portray Him. [Even] those possessed of awakened insight cannot hope to behold the fullness of the luminous rays of His magnificence.

It is useless to ask "where, when, how, how much?", for it was He who created space, time, modality, and quantity, and they cannot contain Him. He encompasses beginninglessness and endlessness, being and cosmos. Whatever can be apprehended by the senses or comprehended by the mind, the Essence of God must be something else altogether; for all of that is ephemeral, and the ephemeral can apprehend only that which, like itself, is ephemeral. This is in itself a proof of His existence, for [realizing one's] incapacity to apprehend is a kind of apprehension. None can know the nature of the One but the One. The most that the monotheist can do is reach the limit of his own perception, which is in no wise the limit of the One, for He is without limit. Anyone who claims to have full knowledge of the One is simply deluded. God says, *The Deceiver deceived you about God* (Qur'ân 57:14).

The beginning of realization of Divine Unity is to negate separation and hold to unity; yet at the end, the monotheist may be engrossed in unity while beholding separation through the eye of unity, such that neither one precludes the other. That is the culmination of realizing Unity, where it becomes an inherent quality of the monotheist, and the dark outlines of his existence disappear in the brilliant light of God's oneness. Even the light of his monistic knowledge is covered and whelmed by the light of his spiritual state, just as the stars are absorbed into sunlight at dawn. In this station, the monotheist's existence is enveloped in the vision of the beauty of the One in the midst of unity, such that he sees nothing but His Essence and Attributes. The waves of the ocean of Divine Oneness envelop him, and he drowns in unity.

Junayd said, may God sanctify his spirit, "This means that all traces vanish in Him, and all knowledge is enveloped by Him, while God remains exactly as He has always been." It is said that whoever falls into the ocean of Oneness will only grow thirstier as time passes.

The Fundamental Principles of Monotheism

Monotheism requires that five fundamental principles be affirmed. Every legally responsible person is required to believe in them.

The first is to affirm the existence of the Creator, Exalted is He, which absolves one from the error of atheism.

The second is to affirm His oneness, which absolves one from the error of polytheism.

The third is to affirm that He is neither substance nor accident and all that this implies, which absolves one from the error of likening God to creation (*tashbīh*).

The fourth is to affirm that He is free to discharge His power as He chooses, which absolves one from the error of [secondary] causality.

The fifth is to affirm that He has total power over all His creations, which absolves one from the error of attributing influence to nature, the celestial bodies, or the angels.

To say "There is no god but God" is to affirm all of these.



Alli Muslims agree that God Most High is endowed with every perfection, and free of every flaw. However, they differ regarding certain attributes and whether they should be considered perfections or flaws, and hence whether or not they should be attributed to God. Consider the following examples:

The Mu'tazilis say that man creates his own deeds, because if God were to create them and then attribute them to him, and censure him for doing them even though he had not really done

i The content of this section is found almost verbatim in 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām, *al-Qawā'id al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, pp. 307-308.

them, and punish him for them even though he had not made them, this would be unjust of Him; yet injustice is a flaw. How could He do something Himself, then censure someone else for doing it? The Sunnis, for their part, argue that to deny the absolute power of God would be to attribute a flaw to Him, and that for God to punish His creation for what He created would not be unjust, since even the Mu'tazilis must admit that animals, insane people, and children experience suffering. God may do as He pleases in His kingdom: *He is not questioned about what He does* (Qur'ān 21:23). The opinion that God is obliged to do what is best [by human standards] is false. The Sunnis therefore say that God creates the deeds of His servants, and that for Him to punish them for what they do not create is possible and not unjust.

A second example is that the corporealists differ with those who deny that God has a physical body. The corporealists say that if He did not have a body He would be nonexistent, which is the greatest flaw of them all. They also argue that to say He is beyond direction amounts to denying His existence, since it is impossible to conceive of something that exists without having a direction. Those who deny corporealism argue that if He were a body He would be contingent and lack the perfection of beginninglessness. They also say that the absence of direction only implies nonexistence for something that is confined by direction; yet God existed in pre-eternity before the creation of direction itself, and therefore this does not apply to Him.

A third example is that the Mu'tazilis argue that God is obliged to reward those who obey Him, lest He be blemished by the imperfection of injustice. Al-Ash'arī argued that this [i.e. not rewarding them] would not be injustice at all, for God does not owe anything to anyone; and if He did, that would be an imperfection because He would in effect be limited by them, which is an imperfection.

A fourth example is that the Mu'tazilis claim that obedience [to Him] is God's will and disobedience is against His will, regardless of whether they occur or not, since it would be an imperfection on His part if He willed to be disobeyed. Al-Ash'arī argued that on the contrary, it would be an imperfection on His part if He willed something that did not occur, since it would mean that He was unable to carry out His will.

A fifth example is that the Mu'tazilis hold that God is obliged to look after the best interests of His servants, since it would be an imperfection for Him to do otherwise. Al-Ash'arī's position was that He is not obliged to do so, for it would be an imperfection on His part if He were constrained by obligations to those who worship Him. All success is from God.



Those who attribute both will and acquisition to themselves are called Qadaris; those who attribute neither to themselves are called Jabarīs; those who attribute the will to God and the acquisition to themselves are the rightly-guided Sunni Sufis. An individual's potential and motion are created by God, and belong to the individual by attribution and acquisition. Destiny (*qadar*) is the name for what is generated (*muqaddar*) by the action of the All-Powerful (*al-Qādir*). Decree (*qaḍā'*) means creation. The difference between destiny and decree is that fate is the broader term, decree the narrower. *Qadar* is the initial predestination of a matter, while *qaḍā'* is the precise and final decision on that matter, as when one says "the judge gave judgement."

The Major Heresies (*Ahwā'*)

There are six major heresies, which are arranged into three opposing pairs. The first pair is *tashbih* and *ta'til*, likening God to creation on the one hand and denying God or His attributes on the other. The second pair is *jabar* and *qadar*, fatalism on the one hand and denying destiny on the other. The second pair is *rafḍ* and *naṣb*, hatred for the Prophet's ﷺ Companions on the one hand, and hatred for his ﷺ Family on the other. These major heresies then divide into twelve branches. Each pair is composed of extreme opposites, and they are all astray from the straight path, the middle path of the People of the Sunna and the Community.

The adherents of *tashbih* go to such extremes in affirming the attributes of God that they fall into the error of likening Him to creation, attributing to Him such things as relocation, incarnation, settling, and sitting. The adherents of *ta'til* go to such extremes in denying *tashbih* that they deny God and His Attributes altogether. The Sunnis follow the middle path and affirm the attributes of God just as they are related by His Revelation, without likening Him to creation or denying Him. This allows them to recognize the satanic paths down which the two extreme factions have strayed.

Likewise, the adherents of *jabar* and *qadar* are far from the straight path. Those who attribute neither will nor acquisition to themselves are Jabarīs; those who attribute both to themselves are Qadarīs; those who attribute the will to God and the acquisition to themselves are Sunnis.

The adherents of *rafḍ* and *naṣb*, too, are far from the straight path. The *rāfiḍī* claims to love the Prophetic Family and directs extreme hatred and calumny towards the Companions. The *nāṣibī* is so extreme in his defense of the Companions that he falls into hatred of the Prophetic Family and accuses 'Alī ﷺ of injustice and unbelief. The Sunnis, in contrast, follow the middle path and love

both the Family and the Companions. God protects them from uttering anything negative about either of them, and they have nothing but praise for both. Praise and thanks be to God!

Divine Decree

The term *qadā'*, "decree", sometimes means a decisive existential command, as in God's words, *When He decrees a thing, He but says to it, 'Be!'*, and it is (Qur'ān 40:68). On other occasions it means a declaration about an obligatory ruling, such as when God says, *Your Lord has decreed that you worship none save Him* (Qur'ān 17:23); if this were a decisive existential command no one would worship anything but God, for they would be unable to resist His decree. Likewise, when God says, *I did not create jinn and mankind save to worship Me* (Qur'ān 51:56), this is a declaration of a ruling, for if it were a decisive existential command everyone would worship Him. The reason there have been disagreements about this subject is that this distinction was overlooked.



When God decrees something in pre-eternity, it is binding upon the individual and determines his words and deeds, for God has made it so and it cannot be changed. One should not say that God changes His decree, for He does not change His mind, and His first decree was not frivolous or arbitrary such that He would change it later. He decreed with wisdom, and there is no changing it. This is true whether it refers to the things that appear to occur directly through the individual's action, such as reaping and sowing, or the things that are outside his sphere of influence, such as his prayers or petitions for forgiveness.

God affirms the actions of His servants several times in the Qur'ān, such as, *as reward for what they used to do* (Qur'ān 56:24); and *slay the idolaters wherever you find them* (Qur'ān 9:5). In other places He negates them, such as when He says, *You slew them not, but God slew them; and you threw not when you threw, but God threw* (Qur'ān 8:17). The wisdom behind this is that He creates and destines the actions, while His servant acquires them and causes them. The servant performs worship, and God rewards him for it. If an action were not attributed in this way, created by God and acquired by the servant, it would not be worship at all. The servant is the worshiper who acquires, while God is the Creator Who is worshiped.

Actions may be divided into two categories. The first is what occurs at the hands of the individual, which is the acquisition that is attributed to him. This is why the Scriptures were revealed and the Messengers sent, and why man required an intellect to comprehend arguments and follow guidance.

The second is what accrues to the individual as recompense, which is in God's Hands and in the individual's hands too, since neither are the result of anything but what he acquires: *Whatever misfortune may befall you is for what your own hands have earned; and He pardons much* (Qur'ān 42:30). One must understand all of this in order to comprehend what God means when He attributes actions to His servants.

For example, consider an executioner who amputates a thief's hand. One could rightfully say that the deed belongs to the executioner, since he is the one who acquires it. One could also rightfully say that it is God Who does the deed by the executioner's hand, for it is His law that is being carried out upon the thief in recompense for his action. One could also rightfully say that the thief himself is cutting off his own hand, since he was the one who committed the crime. Thus the same single deed is performed by God through

recompense, by the criminal through responsibility, and by the executioner through acquisition. None of these perspectives contradicts the other.

There are obvious proofs for this viewpoint in the Qur'ān. Anyone who understands it correctly will find no one to fear but himself, and nothing to hope for but God's mercy.

[Muṭarrif] ibn 'Abd Allāh' said, "When it comes to God, we are all fools." What he meant is that if we consider God's decree, we might imagine that the individual is excused for everything he does; while if we consider His Law and our free will, we might suppose that the individual has full control over everything he does. The truth of the matter is that the individual is not independent of God in anything he says or does, but is held firmly in God's will; nor, however, is he compelled like an animal or an inanimate object. He is saved through the means of salvation, or damned through the means of damnation.



Someone might object: "If [one holds that] contingent potential has any influence over destiny, then that is subtle polytheism. If [one holds that] it has no influence over it, that is pure fatalism." The response to this is that it would only be polytheistic to suggest that ephemeral beings can influence *creation*—but our contention is that their influence is limited to *acquisition*. God does not acquire anything, so there cannot be any suggestion of another being "sharing" in His acquisition. If contingent potential had no effect upon destiny at all, it would make no difference whether it existed or not, and contingent beings would be powerful yet

i Muṭarrif ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Shikhkhīr was a Companion of the Prophet and a hadith narrator.

powerless, which is impossible. The notion that God, Exalted is He, would have revealed the Scriptures, sent the Messengers, issued commands and prohibitions, and offered guidance and warnings—to beings devoid of power or free will—is a claim that could only be made by someone suffering from a mental disorder in need of treatment. The heresies of *jabar* and *qadar* only arose because people tried to cite the Qur'ān in their arguments before they had properly understood it, and because they did not grasp the difference between the eternal power of God and the contingent power of man. God's eternal power is concerned solely with creation, not acquisition, while man's contingent power is concerned solely with acquisition and plays no part in creation. Only contingent power can be accused of injustice, while eternal power is beyond it; as God says, *Truly God does not wrong people in the least, but people wrong themselves* (Qur'ān 10:44).

The Difference Between Knowledge and Gnosis

Gnosis (*ma'rifa*) implies a sense of closeness; it is what takes the heart and affects it in such a way that the effect passes to the rest of the body. For example, knowledge (*'ilm*) is like seeing a fire, while gnosis is like being burned by it. In conventional language, *ma'rifa* means knowledge that brooks no doubt. The term is also used in grammar to mean "definite", as opposed to *nakira*, "indefinite". In Sufi terminology, *ma'rifa* means knowledge that brooks no doubt because its object is God's Essence and Attributes. Gnosis of the Essence is to know that God exists, that He is the One and Only, and that He is a tremendous Entity Who sustains Himself and resembles no other thing. Gnosis of the Attributes is to know that God is Alive, Knowing, Powerful, Hearing, Seeing, and so on for the other Attributes. The secret and spirit of gnosis is realization of [Divine] Unity, which means to recognize that His life, knowledge,

power, will, hearing, seeing, and speech are not like the attributes of created beings: *Nothing is like unto Him* (Qur'ān 42:11).

The sign of gnosis is that the heart is alive with God. God revealed to David ﷺ, "Do you know what it means to know Me? It is for the heart to be alive in beholding Me."

You may ask in what station true gnosis is attained. The answer is that it is in the station of vision and witnessing with the innermost secret of the heart; for He must be beheld to be known. True gnosis lies in the hidden interior of will. God lifts some of the veils and shows them the light of His Essence and Attributes, so that they may know Him. He does not lift all the veils, for then they would be burned away. A poet said, speaking as if for God:

Had I become manifest without a veil,
I would have made orphans of all mankind.
But the veil is subtle and has a meaning
That imparts life to the hearts of lovers.

The disclosure of Divine Magnificence must be met with fear and awe; the disclosure of beauty and goodness must be met with passion; the disclosure of the Attributes must be met with love; and the disclosure of the Essence must be met with recognition of His oneness.

One of the gnostics said, "By God, whenever a man attains worldly gain, God blinds his heart and nullifies his deeds. God created the world in darkness and made the sun to light it; and He created hearts in darkness, and made gnosis to light them. Just as clouds cover the light of the sun, love for the world removes the light of gnosis from the heart."

It is said that the true meaning of gnosis is a light that is cast into the believer's heart. There is no greater treasure than gnosis. Someone said that the sun of the gnostic's heart is brighter than

the real sun, for the real sun can be eclipsed and the real sun sets at night, while the sun in the heart is always shining. A poet said of this:

The daytime sun sets when night falls,
But the sun that shines on hearts never sets.
One who loves the Beloved flies to Him,
In yearning to meet the One he loves.

Dhūl-Nūn [al-Miṣrī]ⁱ said, "The true meaning of gnosis is for [God] the Absolutely Real to send an unbroken stream of subtle lights to the heart." A poet said of this:

The gnostics have hearts with which they know
God's most secret light, concealed in veils;
Deaf to all creatures, blind to their show,
Mute to speaking of their false pretenses.

Someone was once asked, "How can one know if he has attained true gnosis?" He replied, "When there is no room in his heart for anything but his Lord." Someone else said, "The true meaning of gnosis is to witness God without intermediary, modality, or likeness."

The Commander of the Faithful 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ؑ was asked, "Can you see the One you worship?" He replied, "Yes—not with my eyes, but with my heart."

When asked if he had ever seen God, Mighty and Glorious is He, Ja'far al-Ṣādiqⁱⁱ ؑ replied, "I would not worship a lord I had not seen." Someone asked, "How can you have seen Him, when

i An Egyptian ascetic, and one of the greatest early Sufi authorities (d. 245/859 or 248/862).

ii An eminent spiritual master (d. 148/765), descended from the Prophet and revered by Shī'is as the sixth Imam.

Vision cannot encompass Him (Qur'ān 6:103)?” He replied, “The eye cannot behold Him, but hearts can behold Him by the secrets of faith. The senses cannot encompass Him, nor can human analogy describe Him.”

When asked the true meaning of gnosis, a certain gnostic answered, “It is divesting one’s innermost being of all will, and forsaking one’s habits; it is for the heart to be at peace with God Most High with no attachments, and to cease looking away from Him toward any other.”

It is not possible to know the true nature of [God’s] Essence or Attributes, Mighty and Glorious is He, for no one truly knows Him but Himself.

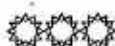


As for insight (*baṣīra*), unveiling (*mukāshafa*), witnessing (*mushāhada*), and direct beholding (*mu'āyana*), all these terms refer to the same thing, only differing with regard to the degree of clarity. Insight functions with the intellect as light does with the eye, and gnosis is like the sun that is the source of this light, allowing it to perceive both gross and subtle things. Then life is the soul of the realization of Unity, as in God’s Words, *Is he who was dead and then We gave him life...?* (Qur'ān 6:122).

Then there is certainty (*yaqīn*). When belief and knowledge gain mastery over the heart without meeting resistance, they produce gnosis in the heart. This gnosis is called certainty, for the true meaning of certainty is that acquired knowledge becomes totally pure as if it were innate rather than learned, and the heart becomes witness to everything of which Revelation informs it regarding this world and the Hereafter. *Yaqīn* is related to the verb *ayqana*, which denotes how water becomes cleansed of impurities.

Then there is inspiration (*ilhām*), which means the attainment of such knowledge without any intermediary or acquisition, but directly by inspiration from God after the heart is purified from any regard for the good things of this world or the Next.

Then there is perspicacity (*firāsa*), which is when God gives the individual a sign that allows him to discern certain hidden properties, whether general or specific, in order to draw them nearer to Him. It is below the level of inspiration, since it requires a sign whereas inspiration does not. God Almighty knows best.





CHAPTER 6

THE MEANING OF THE SOUL, SPIRIT, HEART, AND INTELLECT

There is some overlap in the varied designations of these four terms, but we shall explain them in a manner that suits our purpose here. Let us begin with the heart (*qalb*), which is used two senses.

The first is the pinecone-shaped organ in the left side of the breast, wherein is a hollow cavity containing black blood, which is the source of the animate spirit.

The second is the divine spiritual subtle faculty that is connected to this corporeal heart in the same way as accidents are connected to bodies, or an attribute is connected to its object. This subtle faculty is the true essence of man: the part of him that perceives and knows, the part that is spoken to, instructed, rewarded, and punished.



Next is the spirit (*rūb*), which for our purposes may also be said to have two senses:

The first is a subtle pneumatic body, borne by black blood from its source in the cavity of the corporeal heart through the veins

to all the regions of the body. It flows through the body, bearing the lights of life, sensation, sight, hearing, and smell throughout it, in the same manner as light flows from a lamp to the corners of a room. Life is like the light that reaches the walls, and the spirit is like the lamp. The interior flow and motion of the spirit is like the motion of the lamp around a room when someone carries it. When physicians speak of the spirit, this is what they are talking about: the subtle pneuma produced by the heat of the heart.

The second meaning is the knowing, perceiving subtlety in man that is one of the two inner realities of the heart. It is this that God speaks of when He says, *They ask you about the Spirit. Say, 'The Spirit is from the command of my Lord...'* (Qur'ān 17:85). It is a divine marvel beyond the capacity of most intellects and minds to comprehend.



Next is the soul (*nafs*), which also has two meanings:

The first is the combined faculties of irascibility and appetite in the human being. This is how the Sufis generally use the term, because to them the soul is the epitome of man's blameworthy traits. This is why they speak of the importance of struggling against the soul and breaking its appetites. This is what the Prophet ﷺ meant when he said, "Your worst enemy is your own soul within you."

The second meaning is that same subtle faculty of which we have already spoken: the true essence and self of man. However, this subtle faculty has different attributes depending on the states it undergoes. When it yields to the divine command and resists its appetites so that its agitation subsides, it is called the soul at peace (*nafs muṭma'inna*), as God says: *O soul at peace! Return to your Lord* (Qur'ān 89:27-28). It is unimaginable that the first

definition of the soul given above could return to its Lord, for it is distant from God and allied with Satan.

If the soul is not yet still but has begun to resist its appetites, it is called the self-reproaching soul (*nafs lawwāma*). If it does not resist at all but gives in to appetites and Satanic urges, it is called the evil-enjoining soul (*nafs ammāra bil-sū*).



Last is the intellect (*‘aql*), which for our purposes also has two meanings:

The first is knowledge of the truth of things, in which sense it is another word for knowledge (*‘ilm*) itself, which is stored in the heart.

The second is the faculty that perceives knowledge, which is the heart, by which I mean the true essence of man. When the heart is mentioned in the Qur’ān and Sunna, it means the part of man that understands and recognizes the truth about things. It could also mean the corporeal heart in the breast, since there is a special connection between the subtle intellectual faculty and the physical heart, inasmuch as its connection to the rest of the body is mediated by the physical heart. The physical heart is the intellect’s domain, its mount, its primary channel for the direction of the body. In a certain sense, the heart is to the true essence of man what the Throne is to God.

The Soldiers of the Heart

God has assigned to the heart, spirit, and other realms conscripted soldiers whose true nature and number are known only to Him. Let us discuss some of the heart’s soldiers that are relevant to our purpose. Some are visible to the eye, others only to [spiritual]

insight. The heart here is the king, and soldiers are its servants and assistants.

The visible soldiers of the heart are the hands, the feet, the ears, the eyes, and the tongue. The soldiers of the heart may be divided into three categories:

The first is the impulse that seeks to attract benefit, such as appetite, or seeks to repel harm, such as irascibility. This impulse may be called the will.

The second is the property that moves the body in order to attain these goals, which may be called power. These soldiers are dispersed throughout the body.

The third are the faculties of perception that identify these things, analogous to the king's spies. They are the senses of hearing, sight, taste, smell, and touch. They are also dispersed through the body, and they are composed of flesh, fat, sinew, blood, and bone, which are like the instruments of the soldiers. The activity of this category may be called knowledge and perception. It can further be divided into that which resides in the exterior of the body, namely the five senses, and that which resides in the interior, namely the lobes of the brain. These too are five in number: common sense, imagination, cognition, recollection, and memory.

The common sense (*hiss mushtarak*) is where the images of what the five senses perceive are displayed, as a reflection is displayed in a mirror. It is seated in the front of the front lobe of the brain.

The second faculty, imagination (*khayāl*), is where the common sense stores the images it receives, to retain them until they are needed; for the common sense has the power to receive but not to retain, while the inverse is true of the imagination. It is seated in the back of the front lobe of the brain.

The third faculty, estimation (*wahm*), is seated in the front of the back lobe of the brain. It is concerned with the particular

suprasensory forms stored in the imagination, and so comes after it in the hierarchy because it receives from it.

The fourth faculty, memory (*hifz*), is seated at the back of the middle lobe of the brain beside the estimation, because it serves as its storehouse.

The fifth faculty, cognition (*taṣarruf* or *tafakkur*), is seated in the middle of the brain because it is the noblest faculty, and because sometimes it receives from the imagination and sometimes transmits, both in sleep and in the waking state. Likewise, it transmits to the memory and requests from it when it forgets. It is therefore only appropriate that it be seated between them. God knows best.

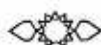
The reason the heart needs these soldiers is that for the journey to God it must have a vehicle and provisions so that it may traverse the route from one station to the next until it meets Him, which was the purpose for which it was created. Its vehicle is the body, and its provisions are knowledge and action. One cannot reach God unless one resides in the body and passes through the world, taking provisions from it, on the way to the final Destination. Therefore one must prepare the body by providing it with its needs, such as nourishment, and protecting it from harm and destruction.

For nourishment it requires two soldiers, one internal and the other external: appetite to seek it, and the body to obtain it. Therefore appetites have been created in the heart, and it has been given a body to discharge these appetites.

For repelling harm it requires another two soldiers, again one internal and the other external: irascibility to repel harm and oppose enemies, and hands and feet to wield the weapons needed to discharge this irascibility.

Finally, if one is to seek nourishment one must know what it is; otherwise, appetite and the instruments to obtain it will not be enough. Therefore two further soldiers are required for knowledge, one internal and the other external: the perceptions of the five

senses, and their bodily instruments. One could fill many volumes with a discussion of the details and wisdoms of these needs. Glory be to God, the Generous, the Forbearing!



There are three categories: body (*jism*), accident (*'araḍ*), and individual substance (*jawhar fard*). The animate spirit is a subtle body like a lighted lamp; life is the lamp, blood its oil, sense and motion are its light, appetite is its heat, and irascibility is its smoke. The faculty that seeks nourishment, which resides in the liver, is its servant, guard, and agent. This spirit exists in every living thing and is common to animals and humans alike. It is a body, and its effects are accidents. Now this spirit is not guided to knowledge, nor does it know the right path for creation or the Creator's due; it is merely a servant, a prisoner. If there is too much or too little blood, the body dies; if the lamp gets too hot or too cold, it goes out. The Revelation of the Almighty Creator and instructions of the Lawgiver ﷻ are not directed at this spirit, for animals and unintelligent beings are not held accountable to the Law.

It must be, therefore, that man is held accountable because of something else within him, something that only he possesses. This is the rational soul, the subtle spirit. This spirit is neither body nor accident. It is a command of God; as He says, *They ask you about the Spirit. Say, 'The Spirit is from the command of my Lord'* (Qur'ān 17:85). The command of God Most High is neither body nor accident; it is a perpetual immutable substance, not subject to entropy, corruption, annihilation, or death. It departs the body and then waits to return to it at the Resurrection, as Scripture relates. The rectitude or corruption of the body depends upon this spirit, whose soldiers are the animate spirit and all the faculties. When the

animate spirit leaves the body, the animate faculties are nullified and the body falls still. This stillness is called death.

Now since the spirit is from the command of God, it is like a stranger in the body and has no particular seat of residence in it. The body is not the seat of the spirit but its instrument. God knows best.



God says, *So when I have shaped him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down prostrating before him* (Qur'ān 15:29). Regarding this verse he said, may God have mercy on him and be pleased with him:ⁱ

"Shaping" (*taswiya*) denotes the action performed on the receptacle for the spirit, which was the clay from which Adam ﷺ was made, and the drop of fluid from which his progeny were made. It was the act of purifying, balancing, and leading this receptacle through the stages of creation until it was finally ready to receive the spirit and retain it, just as a wick is ready to receive and retain fire after it is soaked with oil.

"Breathing" (*nafkh*) denotes the kindling of the fire of the spirit in the receptacle. The breathing was the cause of the kindling; for although it is impossible for God to "breathe" in a literal sense, what is meant is that He caused the spirit to light the wick of the receptacle, thereby achieving the same thing as is achieved by breathing in a literal sense. Breathing takes the form of expulsion of air from the interior of the breather into the interior of the receptacle, the wick, so that it lights up. The cause that made the

i This, added by a copyist or perhaps the compiler of this treatise, apparently means al-Ghazālī himself. In his Qur'ān commentary *Rūb al-Bayān*, Ismā'il Ḥaqqī Burūsawī quotes much of this passage almost verbatim, attributing it to 'Izz al-Dīn ibn 'Abd al-Salām.

light of the spirit kindle was an attribute in the Doer and a corresponding attribute in the receptacle. The attribute in the Doer was generosity, which is the wellspring of existence, an emanation of His true existence upon every existing thing. This attribute may be called the divine power. It is akin to the emanation of light from the sun into every receptacle of luminosity when the barrier between them is removed. The receptacle is characterized by coloration, unlike the air which is colorless.

The corresponding attribute of the receptacle is the balanced upright shape that it received from the shaping, as God says: *So when I have shaped him*. This attribute is akin to that of a mirror, which cannot receive an image until it is polished, even though the image is displayed before it. Once the mirror has been polished, the image displayed before it appears in it. Likewise, once the receptacle was shaped, the spirit was instilled within it by the Creator of the spirit, without the Creator Himself undergoing any change. It was the receptacle that changed in order to accommodate the spirit.

The meaning of the emanation of divine generosity is that this generosity causes the lights of existence to be instilled in everything that can receive it. It is called an emanation (*fayḍ*), but not in the sense of the outpouring (also *fayḍ*) of water from a vessel onto a person's hand, which implies that part of what was in the vessel comes out of it and connects with the hand. God is transcendently beyond such a thing.

The true nature of the spirit is a secret that the Messenger of God ﷺ was not permitted to divulge to anyone who was not qualified for it. If you are one of those qualified for it, then pay heed and understand that the spirit is not a material thing that resides in the body like water in a cup, nor an accident that resides in the heart or brain like the color black in a black object, or knowledge in the knower. All people of insight agree that it is an indivisible substance; for if it were divisible it would be possible for part of it

to know something while another part is ignorant of it, such that it would be simultaneously aware of, and ignorant of, the very same thing. That is impossible, which indicates that the spirit is one and indivisible.

If you ask why the Messenger of God ﷺ was not permitted to divulge the true nature of the spirit, the answer is that the spirit has attributes which not all minds can comprehend. People are divided into the masses and the elite. If you were to tell an ordinary man what the spirit really is, he would scarcely believe that the Spirit of God could be so, never mind the spirit of man. The Karrāmīs, Hanbalis, and others with mediocre minds denied that God Most High transcends corporeality, for they could not conceive of how anything could exist without a body. Someone who is able to rise a little above the average mind can understand that God Most High does not have a body, but he still may be unable to deny that He is subject to the accidents that are associated with corporeality, and so he attributes a direction to Him. The Ash'aris and Mu'tazilis were able to rise above that mediocre mentality and recognize that God transcends corporality and direction.

If you ask why it is not permitted to divulge this secret to such people, the answer is that they would find it inconceivable for anyone but God to possess such attributes. If you told them otherwise, they would deem you an unbeliever and accuse you of likening God to His creation by claiming for yourself an attribute that only God could possess, owing to their ignorance of God's exclusive Attributes. For man is alive, knowing, powerful, willing, hearing, seeing, and speaking, all of which are true of God; yet this is not to liken God to His creation, for those attributes are not exclusive to God. Likewise, it is not only God that is beyond the confines of space and direction. God's unique Attribute is that He is self-subsistent while all else subsists through Him, and that He exists through His own Essence and not through anything else.

All other things are nonexistent in themselves and must borrow their existence from Him. Intrinsic existence and self-subsistence belong to God alone.

You may ask what it means that God attributes the spirit to Himself, saying, *and breathed into him of My Spirit*. Now, the spirit is transcendent beyond direction and space, and has the potential to know all that can be known, which is a property that it shares with no corporeal being. This correspondence explains why it is fitting for it to be attributed to God Himself.

What, then, does *The Spirit is from the command of my Lord* mean? What is the realm of command and the realm of creation? Everything that is subject to dimension and measure pertains to the sphere of bodies and accidents. This is the realm of creation, which here has the sense of "measuring-out" (*taqdir*) rather than the sense of engendering and making. Anything that has no quantity or measure can be called a divine Command; this is the correspondence of which we just spoke. Anything of this kind, such as the spirits of human beings and angels, is said to belong to the Realm of Command, which is an expression denoting those things that fall within the scope of sensation, imagination, direction, space, and the confines of dimension, measure, and quantity.

You may object that this implies that the spirit is eternal and uncreated. Indeed, some have fallen into this error through ignorance. If one says that the spirit is uncreated in the sense that it is not subject to measure because it is indivisible and unconfined, then one is correct; yet nevertheless it is created in the sense that it is contingent, not eternal. The engendering of the human spirit requires the preparation of the receptacle, the drop of fluid, which we likened earlier to the polishing of the mirror so that the image that already exists may be reflected in it.

You may ask the meaning of the Prophet's ﷺ words, "God created Adam in His own image" (Muslim 115), or "in the image

of the All-Merciful.”¹ The answer is that the term *ṣūra* (image or form) has several meanings. It can be used to denote a composition of shapes placed together in a particular arrangement, which is the sensory meaning of the term. It can also mean a composition of suprasensory meanings, which can also be placed together to form an arrangement. One may speak of the form of an academic issue, or the form of an art, whether material or conceptual. The kind meant here is a suprasensory intellectual form, namely the correspondence we described earlier. It all comes back to the Essence, Attributes, and Acts. The true nature of the essence of the spirit is that it is self-subsistent, not an accident, body, nor delimited substance; that it has no locus in space or direction; and that it is neither connected to nor separate from the body or the world, neither inside nor outside them. All of these are true of the Essence of God.

As for the Attributes, man was created alive, knowing, powerful, willing, hearing, seeing, and speaking; and God is all of these. With regard to the Acts too, the human being’s action begins with will, whose effect manifests first in the heart and is then communicated through the animate spirit, which is a subtle pneuma in the heart, upwards to the brain and then from there to the limbs, which carry out the action. For example, this impulse may direct the fingers to move, grip a pen, and write upon paper whatever words were formed in the imagination first, since without the imagination there would be nothing to write. Reflect on this, and then reflect on how God’s Acts come into manifestation; how He creates life and vegetation upon the earth by means of the motion of the celestial bodies, and in the heavens by means of the angels. Then you will understand the meaning of the Prophet’s ﷺ words, “God Most High created Adam, peace be upon him, in His image.”

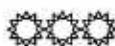
You may object that if spirits are brought into existence alongside bodies, what is the meaning of the Prophet’s ﷺ words, “God

created the spirits two thousand years before the bodies"¹, "I was the first Prophet to be created and the last to be sent"², and, "I was a Prophet when Adam was between water and clay"³!

The answer is that none of this implies that the spirit is beginningless. The outward meaning of his words "I was the first of the Prophets to be created" does seem to be that he existed before his body did; but we must go further than the outward meaning and find an interpretation, since that is where the truth lies, just as is the case for the expressions that outwardly seem to liken God to His creation.

Therefore we say that by "God created the spirits two thousand years before the bodies," he meant that the spirits of the angels were created before the material objects in the cosmos such as the Throne, the Pedestal, the heavens, the celestial bodies, air, water, and earth. And when he said, "I was the first of the Prophets to be created", he meant creation in the sense of divine ordinance, not engendering. He ﷺ did not exist as a created being before his birth, but all his purposes and perfections were ordained by divine decree first, and later came into existence. God begins by ordaining; that is, engraving the Divine Commandments upon the Preserved Tablet in accordance with His knowledge. If you understand these two modes of existence, you will see how the Prophet ﷺ could have existed before Adam ﷺ in the sense of ordained existence, not material existence.

That is all we have to say about the spirit; and God knows best.



i Ahmad, *Musnad* 16623 with "between spirit and body."



CHAPTER 7

THE MEANING OF LOVE

Love is the culmination of the realization of unity, and of gnosis. Every station and state that precedes it both leads up to it and draws from it. The purest expression of it is to affirm all that is true of the Essence and Attributes of God, Exalted is He, and His utter flawlessness and total perfection. To love God is an obligation recognized by the Qur'ān, the Sunna, and the consensus of the Muslims; it is only the meaning of this love that is disputed. The sole meaning of love is attraction to that wherein one finds bliss and comfort. To know God Most High is to remember Him, for it is to be present with Him and to witness Him.

In the beginning, the sign of it is what has been called a flash of light (*lā'ihā*), a gleam (*tālī'a*), a glitter (*lāmi'a*), or a lightning bolt (*barq*), all of which mean essentially the same thing. The difference between the lightning bolt and ecstasy (*wajd*) is that the lightning bolt confers permission to walk the path of Divine Oneness, whereas ecstasy accompanies you upon that path. If ecstasy persists, it becomes experiential tasting.

Tasting (*dhawq*)ⁱ means experiencing the sweetness of the luminous flashes of light that you witness, as if you were drinking them.

Gazing (*lahz*) means beholding God Most High with the heart; as the Prophet ﷺ said, "Worship God as if you see Him" (Bukhārī 50).

The moment (*waqt*) is the container that holds the individual and whatever state he undergoes; a person's moment is wherever he finds himself right now.

Purity (*ṣafāʾ*) means freedom from turbidity.

Breath (*nafas*) is the sigh that a person emits when he is unable to bear the spiritual states that visit him. It may take the form of a wordless exhalation, an uttered word, or some other allusion to his condition. As long as a person is alive, he will continue to breathe in and out. If the breathing is strong, it leads to "drowning".

"Drowning" (*gharaq*) is the inability to breathe because the breath is suppressed. In this state the individual neither breathes, nor is he absent to his breath. If this becomes strong for him, he enters [the state of] "absence".

Absence (*ghayba*) means obliviousness to distractions because of absorption in something more important.

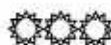
Intoxication (*sukr*) means loss of control in the midst of rapture. If it is followed by divine nurture, the disciple sobers up and his intoxication is transformed into knowledge. Intoxication cannot lead one to truth, for the truth is always sobering. Intoxication in God means beholding His Attributes and experiencing the bliss of His gifts and inspirations.

Sobriety (*ṣaḥw*) in God means renouncing one's own self, one's bliss, and one's spiritual states. If the disciple is then granted witnessing of the Essence through the attributes of self-sustenance,

i The list of terms defined here corresponds to a section of the list of spiritual states from the *Manāzil al-sāʾirīn* of Khwāja ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1088), from which al-Ghazālī quotes in the following chapter. The actual definitions of the terms, however, are not taken from al-Anṣārī.

which are the Attributes of Divinity, they will annihilate him to everything except the One he worships, and he will become annihilated even to his own annihilation.

Annihilation (*fanā*) in the material sense means that a body or accident vanishes entirely so there is nothing left of it. Now since everything besides God exists solely through Him and is sustained solely by Him, not by itself, this means that its existence is only figurative. Only the One Who sustains Himself and all other things possesses true existence. The term "annihilation" is used to describe [the state of] one who is granted direct knowledge of this truth, for all things vanish in the eye of his heart, and he views all things through the Divine Power, like an infant with no power of his own. If he is then granted assistance and perfection, he rises to the station of subsistence [through God] (*baqā*); for if nothing subsists in the heart but God because of its total absorption in Him, this is called subsisting with God through God. Existence and subsistence really mean the same thing; for existence means the discoveryⁱ of the true nature of a thing, and subsistence is the most precious reality that can be sought. The same is true of the station of synthetic unitive vision (*jam'*); one of the mastersⁱⁱ said, "unification is what nullifies separation and severs allusion." This means that your remembrance of God and God's remembrance of you are one and the same. Praise be to God alone.



i *Wujūd* (existence) is closely related to the verb *wajada*, "to find."

ii 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī, in the aforementioned *Manāzil al-sā'irin*.



CHAPTER 8

THE MEANING OF FAMILIARITY WITH GOD, EXALTED IS HE

Familiarity (*uns*) is one of the most precious fruits of love. The true meaning of familiarity is the heart's delight and joy upon beholding the unveiling of God's nearness, beauty, and perfection.

Someone has said that the true meaning of nearness is when the heart becomes insensate to all things and the mind finds rest in God. I would say, however, that this is not the definition of nearness but rather the means by which nearness is attained, for it means the purification of the heart from all besides God. When your heart is free of all but God, you will become present with God, for there is nothing between you and God except the veil and distractions of your own soul. If you become annihilated to your soul and its distractions, you will recognize how the world is sustained by God's power, and so you will see how near God is to it, how His will is fixed upon it, and how His power gives it existence and subsistence. You will see how His Attributes never part from the One they pertain to, and how they subsist through

Him. The gnostic does not speak by himself when he speaks, nor hear by himself when he hears, as the well-known hadith describes.ⁱ

The spiritual states of the gnostics arise from their nearness to God. The spiritual states of ordinary righteous people arise from their knowledge of God's existence in a general sense, as well as their knowledge of His power to give and withhold, to save or damn. The gnostics see their Lord in this world with the eye of certitude and insight, and in the Hereafter with the physical eye; for the eye is near them in both worlds, and the only difference is that in the Next World they will be favored with even more of the Divine Kindness and Affection. For neither in this world or the Next is there any question of spatial distance from God.

The fruit of this knowledge is familiarity, as long as the heart is pure. Familiarity leads to tranquility (*sakina*), for it calms the heart's exhilaration and makes it stable and balanced, so that it may observe proper conduct in the Divine Presence. This is necessary because the bliss of nearness and consolation makes the hearts of the gnostics soar in exhilaration, and man is always at risk of error when he is at his most rapturous.

As for serenity (*tuma'nina*), it is the delight and joy that arise in the heart after it is balanced and composed by tranquility, due to the heart's awareness of the gifts it is receiving. It accompanies consolation because it is desirable in and of itself.

Love can also lead to exuberance and boldness. When a person experiences constant consolation and his heart is not in the least anxious, because he looks no further than his present agreeable situation, he becomes exuberant in his words, deeds, and prayers. Yet this does not befit the majesty and magnificence of God, which

i "My servant continues to draw near to Me with voluntary acts [of worship] until I love him. When I love him, I become his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his foot with which he walks." Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 6502.

ought to be met with awe. Something that is appropriate for a state of consolation and exuberance may not be appropriate for a state of awe and humility. It is possible for God to approve of something that someone does, yet disapprove of the very same thing when someone else does it, because of their situation and the precedent of the Divine Wisdom concerning them. Hence He is jealously protective of His Word, lest anyone heard it but His chosen ones: *And We place veils upon their hearts so that they understand it not, and in their ears deafness* (Qur'ān 17:46); and He explains the secret of this: *Had God known of any good in them, He would have made them hear* (Qur'ān 8:23). This is the veil of jealous zeal, the true meaning of which is to preserve one's time with God lest one be distracted by anything other than Him.

Another of the fruits of love is yearning, which is superior to familiarity; for familiarity means looking no further than whatever beauty of the Beloved has been revealed to one, and not to look for what one lacks. Yearning, in contrast, is like thirst that cannot be quenched by mere vapor but only by water. Anyone who yearns knows that the divine secrets that have been disclosed to him are but a drop in the ocean of those that remain hidden; and God is beyond compare. This knowledge causes him to feel constant thirst, agitation, and urgency. The true meaning of urgency is immediate movement towards the object of one's desire, and total lack of patience to be without it. Thirst, likewise, means powerful craving for something one needs. In the midst of this urgency and thirst, he experiences the true meaning of ecstasy, which is yearning that overwhelms the heart. After this ecstasy is attained, the lover passes through several states.

The first is astonishment (*dahsh*), as described in God's Words, *And when they saw him they were awestricken by him and cut their hands* (Qur'ān 12:31). Astonishment is when the heart becomes momentarily insensate after something tremendous surprises it.

After astonishment comes bewilderment (*hayamān*), when the lover calms down a little and the heart enters a stupor of amazement at the beauty and splendor of what it beholds. Bewilderment means to be so amazed that one loses one's composure. It lasts longer than astonishment.

Then comes familiarity and stability (*tamakkun*), when the seeker regains his composure as though he had never been stunned to begin with. The Shaykhⁱ says, "Stability means total fixedness." As the lover experiences spiritual states with God, sometimes the state is too powerful for him, and other times it is within his power. Sometimes he undergoes variegation (*talawwun*), and other times he remains firm and stable. So it is for each state he experiences; and when he becomes stable, he ascends to a higher state. It is then that the state from which he ascends changes from a mutable state (*hāl*) to a firm station (*maqām*). God knows best.



If one experiences these states when in company but not when alone, he is deficient and must be more vigilant with himself. Conversely, if one experiences them when alone but not when in company that is good, but it still falls short of perfection; for perfection lies in maintaining these states at all times, whether alone or in company, whether at home or abroad, whether free or occupied. Only the beginner needs to find free time for himself in order to engage in the spiritual life; the advanced seeker is always engaged in it.

The degree of love for God that is obligatory is that one incline towards faith in the fundamental doctrines of Islam regarding the Essence and Attributes of God. If one is ignorant of any of them, this means that one's love is lacking in the measure of it, and thus

i Al-Anṣārī in *Manāzil al-sā'irīn*.

one is guilty of two sins: ignorance, and lacking the fruit of faith. The true meaning of faith is to have presence of heart with God, and to bear witness to all the signs of His existence. God knows best. A poet said:

Familiarity with God no brave warrior can gain
Nor can anyone attain it by using stratagems.
Those who become familiar are noble people;
All of them are God's chosen, all devoted to action.

Those who are overcome by familiarity with God desire only to be alone in seclusion. Al-Wāsiṭiⁱ said, "None can find familiarity with God but those who feel alienated from all creation." Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Warrāqⁱⁱ said, "Familiarity with God must be accompanied by awe of Him. Whomever you feel at ease with, your heart ceases to revere them—except for God Most High: one cannot increase in familiarity with Him without increasing in reverence and awe for Him."



Oneⁱⁱⁱ may experience familiarity in [acts of] obedience to God, remembrance of Him, recitation of His Book, and other kinds of worship that draw you nearer to Him. This kind of familiarity is certainly a blessed gift from God, Exalted is He, but it is not the same thing as the spiritual state of familiarity that lovers experience. True familiarity is a noble state attained when the inner being is purified by true detachment, total God-consciousness, the severing

i A Sufi master and theologian of Baghdad (d. ca. 320/932).

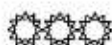
ii A Sufi sage who is quoted in al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*.

iii This passage is found verbatim in Chapter 61 of Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar al-Suhrawardī's *Awārif al-Ma'ārif*.

of all attachments, and the erasure of all intrusive thoughts and misgivings.

In my view, its true meaning is for all of existence to be swept away in a flash of magnificence, so that the spirit may roam freely through the pastures of glory, enveloping the heart and keeping it composed in a state of awe; for it is in awe that the spirit is gathered. This is familiarity with the Essence. Awe of the Essence is in the station of subsistence, after the bridge of annihilation is crossed. They are not the same as the familiarity and awe that pass away in annihilation, having arisen before it through the vision of the Attributes of Majesty and Beauty. That is the station of variegation, whereas we are speaking of the station of stability and subsistence through vision of the Essence.

The humility of the soul at peace is from familiarity, while its reverence is from awe. Humility (*khudū'*) and reverence (*khushū'*) are similar but not identical; there is a subtle difference between them that the spirit might just grasp. God knows best.





CHAPTER 9

THE MEANING OF SHAME OR MODESTY (*HAYĀ'*) AND OF VIGILANCE (*MURĀQABA*)ⁱ

To these may be added excellence (*ihsān*), since it is their ultimate purpose, and also awareness (*ri'āya*), veneration (*hurma*), and good conduct (*adab*), since they are their fruits.

Shame is the first station of drawing nearer to God, just as repentance is the first station of God-consciousness. Shame is provoked by the knowledge that God can see one, which is essential because it is part of faith in God. It is further provoked by awareness of one's faults and shortcomings towards one's Lord, which is also essential for the same reason. Awareness of these two produces a state which is called shame; it means that the eye of the heart looks downwards out of shyness before God, ashamed of its failure to fulfill His due. The minimum degree of shame that is required is whatever is enough to prompt one to abstain from sin and fulfill one's obligations.

Vigilance and excellence mean essentially the same thing. The first fruit of vigilance is that it causes one to become aware of one's

ⁱ Much of this chapter is found verbatim in Chapter 61 of Shihāb al-Dīn 'Umar al-Suhrawardī's *Awārif al-Ma'ārif*.

own thoughts and their obscurities, and to have good conduct with God Most High by maintaining sanctity through vigilance and shame, both in a universal and in a personal sense. The Prophet ﷺ described the universal sense of shame when he said, "Be fittingly ashamed before God." His Companions said, "But we are ashamed, Messenger of God." He replied, "Not [like] that! Anyone who would be truly ashamed before God must guard his head and the thoughts it harbors, and guard his belly and what it consumes, and remember death and decay. He who desires the Hereafter must renounce the glamor of this world. Whoever does this is fittingly ashamed before God." This shame is a true spiritual station, while the other kind of shame, the personal kind, is a spiritual state. It is the shame described in the narration of how 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān رضي الله عنه said, "I bathe in a dark room, but I still cover my body out of shame before God, Almighty and Glorious is He." Sarī al-Saqatīⁱ reportedly said, "Shame and consolation circle about from one heart to the next. If they find asceticism and piety in a heart, they settle down there. If not, they depart."

Shame means for the spirit to lower itself in reverence before the divine Majesty, while familiarity is the spirit's blissful enjoyment of the divine Beauty. When they come together, that is the ultimate goal.

A sage said, "If someone speaks about shame but does not have shame before God Almighty as he speaks, he has been tempted astray." Dhūl-Nūn said, "Shame is the presence of awe in the heart, and regret for how you have transgressed against your Lord."

Ibn 'Aṭā' [al-Adami]ⁱⁱ said, "The greatest knowledge is awe and shame. If a man has neither, there is no good in him."

i A Sufi master of Baghdad (d. 253/867) who was the uncle and the shaykh of Junayd.

ii Ibn 'Aṭā' (d. 309/922) was a Sufi of Baghdad and one of the major disciples of Junayd.

Sulaymān [not further identified] said, "The deeds of God's servants have four levels: fear, hope, reverence, and shame. The highest level is to act with shame, for it means to be certain that God can see one at all times. The one who is certain of this will be more ashamed of his good deeds than sinners are of their sins."

Someone else said, "Those who feel shame have hearts filled with reverence and awe of God at all times, for they know that He is watching them." Shaykh Abūl-Najīb al-Suhrawardī said:ⁱ

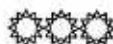
I yearn for Him, but when He appears
I lower my head in reverence,
Not out of fear, but out of awe
and as protection for His Beauty.
Death is whenever He turns away;
Life is whenever He turns to me.
Resigned, without Him I stand firm
And yearn for a vision of His image.

Vigilance has two levels. The first level is the vigilance of the folk of true faith (*ṣiddiqūn*) who are nearest God, which is vigilance rooted in reverence and awe. It is for the heart to be so engrossed and awestricken by the divine Majesty that it has no capacity to turn towards anything else whatsoever. This vigilance does not leave any room for expectations of reward, as it is limited to the heart. The outward body is not able to engage even in inward discourse, never mind outward dialogue. When it performs acts

i Abūl-Najīb, the founder of the Suhrawardiyya Sufi order, was only fourteen years old at the time of Imam Ghazālī's death in 1111. These lines are also found in the aforementioned chapter of *ʿAwārif al-Maʿārif*, the famous treatise by Abūl-Najīb's nephew Shihāb al-Dīn ʿUmar, so it appears that the compiler of this treatise was quoting directly from there but confused the two Suhrawardīs.

of obedience, it does so as if under the control of another, and requires no deliberation or effort to keep it from going astray.

The second level is the vigilance of the pious "folk of the right side" (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*) (Qur'ān 56:8, 38, and 90). They are aware that God can see them both outwardly and inwardly, but they are not astonished by beholding His Majesty. Their hearts remain balanced and retain the capacity to observe their own states and deeds, but they are nevertheless vigilant when engaged in worship. They are truly ashamed before God, and do not precede forward or hold back until they have become stable. They abstain from anything that would disgrace them at the Resurrection. They know in this world that God is watching them, and they do not need to wait until the Hereafter for confirmation of this. You will see the difference between the two levels in your own personal experiences. God knows best.





CHAPTER 10

THE MEANING OF NEARNESSⁱ

God says, *But prostrate and draw near* (Qur'ān 96:19). It is related that the nearest that a servant comes to his Lord is when he prostrates. Tasting the sweetness of prostration draws one nearer to God, for in prostration the carpet of the cosmos is rolled up, and the servant prostrates upon the hem of the cloak of magnificence.

Someone said, "Sometimes I do not feel the divine Presence, so I have to say, 'Dear God!', or 'Dear Lord!'—and this weighs more heavily upon me than a mountain." When asked why this was, he replied, "When you call someone, it means there is a barrier between you and them. Did you ever see anyone cry out for someone sitting beside him? No; between them it is all signs, whispers, and glances."

Now what he was describing is a station that is hard to attain, wherein nearness to God is truly realized. Yet its hallmarks are self-effacement and intoxication, which are granted only to one whose soul has disappeared into the light of his spirit. When he sobers up and regains consciousness the spirit and soul become free of each other, and the person returns to his previous station.

i This chapter too is derived verbatim from Chapter 61 of *'Awārif al-Ma'ārif*.

It is there that he calls out with the voice of the soul at peace, "Dear God, dear Lord!"; for his soul has returned to its station of neediness and servitude, while the spirit is too engrossed in its glories to resort to speech. This is more perfect and closer to God than the other, for it allows the spirit its glorious freedom while still maintaining the soul's formal servitude through expressing its neediness. The spirit draws ever nearer precisely because the soul's servitude is acknowledged.

Junayd said, "God is as close to the hearts of His servants as they are to Him; so ask yourself what your heart is close to." Abū Ya'qūb al-Sūsīⁱ said, "The servant may draw closer to God, but he is not truly close to Him until he is so close that he becomes oblivious to the closeness itself." A poet said:

I realized You inwardly,
And so my tongue cried out to You;
Some meanings united us,
Some realities unite us,
Some realities divide.
Though Your unseen Immensity
Is beyond my vision's reach,
Yet my ecstatic yearning
Has brought You close to my heart.

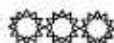
Dhūl-Nūn said, "The closer one gets to God, the more awestricken one is of Him." Sahl [al-Tustarī] said, "The lowest station of nearness is shame." Al-Naṣrābādhīⁱⁱ said, "By following the Sunna, one attains knowledge; by fulfilling one's obligations, one attains

i A Sufi sage who is mentioned several times in al-Qushayrī's *Risāla*,

ii Probably Abūl-Qāsim al-Naṣrābādhī, the teacher of Abū Alī al-Daqqāq who in turn was the master of Abūl-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, author of the famous *Risāla* on Sufism.

THE MEADOW OF SEEKERS

nearness; by being constant in voluntary worship, one attains love.”
Praise be to God alone.





CHAPTER II

THE NOBILITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE OBLIGATION OF SEEKING IT

The heavens and earth and all that they contain were created for the sake of knowledge and action. God says, *God it is Who created seven heavens, and of the earth their like. The Command descends between them, that you may know that God has power over all things, and that God encompasses all things in knowledge* (Qur'ān 65:12). This verse is enough to show how noble knowledge is, and how it is essential to seek it, especially knowledge of the Divine Oneness. God also says, *I did not create jinn and mankind save to worship Me* (Qur'ān 51:56). This verse is enough to show the nobility of worship and how essential it is to devote oneself to it.

These two tremendous things, then, were the reason for the creation of this world and the Next. It therefore befits the individual to concern himself with them alone, and not to expend effort on anything else. Knowledge is the nobler of the two, but it must be accompanied by worship, for otherwise it is nothing but dust in the wind.

Knowledge has precedence over worship for two reasons. The first is that worship can only be valid if it is based on knowledge. The second is that beneficial knowledge causes reverence and

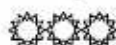
awe of God to grow in the heart, which leads to obedience and precludes sin, with God's help and grace; and these are the only two things a person needs to worship God.

You must therefore seek beneficial knowledge. You must first know the One you worship, for how could you worship Him without knowing Him through His Names, Attributes, and Essence, and what is necessarily true of Him, and what is impossible to ascribe to Him? Otherwise, you might believe something untrue about His Attributes, rendering your worship invalid. You must also know what you are required to do by the Law, so that you may do as you are commanded and abstain from what is forbidden to you.

The kind of knowledge that is required of every responsible individual may be divided into three categories. The first is knowledge of Divine Unity, of which you must know enough to understand the fundamentals of the religion and its doctrines.

The second is knowledge of the inner secret, meaning that which pertains to the heart and the inner faculties, and what is required of them and forbidden to them.

The third is knowledge of outward acts of worship pertaining to one's body and one's property. If God blesses you with the grace to know what you must know, do what you must do, and abstain from what you must abstain from, you will fulfill your obligation to God and become one of the people of knowledge and action. All success is from God.





CHAPTER 12

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL NAMES OF GOD

The Most Beautiful Names ultimately signify an Essence and seven Attributes, according to the Sunnis and contrary to the Mu'tazilis and philosophers. The name is distinct from the act of naming and from the named; it is the word designated to signify the named.

Perfection and happiness lie in adopting the traits of God and adorning oneself with the meanings of His Names and Attributes as much as is humanly possible. Do not make the mistake of thinking that sharing in an attribute is the same thing as resembling the one with whom one shares it. That is far from the truth. Consider how God exists, although not in a place, and how He is endowed with life, knowledge, power, will, hearing, sight, speech, and act. All of this is also true of man—does this mean that to attribute these things to man is to liken him to God? Of course not. Resemblance means sharing a common type and quiddity. The special distinction of God is that He is the Intrinsically Necessary Being, by Whose power everything within the realm of possibility comes into existence with the utmost order and perfection. This special characteristic could not possibly be shared or resembled, and no one truly knows it but God Almighty.

All of creation have no choice but to acknowledge that this ordered, structured world requires a creator who is living, knowing, and powerful. This recognition has two paths: the first concerns the world, which obviously requires a maker. The second concerns God, who has Names derived from certain Attributes that do not pertain directly to the Essence and its nature. If we say "living, knowing, and powerful", this implies a being endowed with the attributes of life, knowledge, and power. At first, the individual knows only himself. Then he is able to compare the Attributes of God to his own attributes, and see how God's are far beyond being compared to his. No one but God can truly know God; indeed, only a Prophet can know what Prophethood is, while everyone else knows only the name.

You may then ask to what extent the gnostics are able to know God. The answer is that their knowledge lies in that they are shown that no one but God can know the Essence of God. Their knowledge of God is confined to His Names and Attributes; and the disparity among them is determined by the degree to which the wonders of His ordinance and the marvels of His Signs in this world and the Next are disclosed to them. God knows best.



Theⁱ meanings of the Most Beautiful Names of God may be summarized in ten categories.

The first are those which designate the Essence only. This means first and foremost the name God, and also [the Name] the Real when it is used to mean the Essence inasmuch as it is Necessary Being.

i This section is found almost verbatim in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, Imam al-Ghazālī's treatise on the Divine Names.

The second are those which designate the Essence in a negative [apophatic] sense, such as the Holy, Peace, the Absolutely Independent, the One, and so on. To call Him "the Holy" means to negate in respect of Him anything that might occur to the mind or the imagination. To call Him "Peace" means to negate in respect of Him every flaw and imperfection. To call Him "Independent" means to negate in respect of Him every need. To call Him "One" means to negate in respect of Him any peer or division.

The third are those which designate the Essence in a positive [cataphatic] sense, such as the Sublime, the Tremendous, the First, the Last, the Manifest, the Hidden, and so on. The Sublime is the One Who is above all other entities in rank, which is a positive attribution. The Tremendous describes the Essence as beyond the bounds of perception. The First is the One Who precedes all things in existence; the Last is the One to Whom all things are destined to return. The Manifest is the Essence vis-à-vis deduction through rational thought; the Hidden is the Essence vis-à-vis the perception of the senses and imagination.

The fourth is that which designates the Essence both negatively and affirmatively, such as the King and the Almighty. The King is the Essence that needs nothing and is needed by everything. The Almighty is the One Who is without peer, and also the One Who is sorely needed and difficult to reach.

The fifth is that which designates the Essence with an attribute that affirms it, such as the Living, the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful, the Willing, the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing, and the Speaking.

The sixth is that which designates knowledge with an added aspect, such as the All-Wise, the All-Aware, the Witness, and the Reckoner. The All-Wise refers to knowledge of the most noble objects. The All-Aware refers to knowledge of hidden things. The Witness refers to knowledge of visible things. The Reckoner refers

to knowledge that encompasses delimited objects that can be enumerated.

The seventh is that which designates power with an added aspect, such as the Strong, the Firm, and the Subjugating. The Strong refers to total power, the Firm to intense power, and the Subjugating to the overwhelming effect of this power upon its object.

The eighth is that which designates will with an added aspect, such as the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful, the Kind, and the Loving. Mercy refers to will along with fulfilling the need of the weak. Kindness means especially intense mercy. Love means will along with compassion and favor. Mercy requires a needy recipient, whereas love does not, for the favor can come first.

The ninth is that which designates the Essence along with an attribute implying a subject-object relationship, such as the Creator, the Maker, the Shaper, the Giver, the Provider, the Opener, the Expander, the Contractor, the Lowerer, the Raiser, the Exalter, the Abaser, the Just, the Nourisher, the Deliverer, the Responder, the Vast, the Resurrector, the Beginner, the Returner, the Live-Giver, the Death-Dealer, the Promoter, the Postponer, the Patron, the Beneficent, the Relenting, the Avenger, the Equitable, the Assembler, the Bestower, the Withholder, the Enricher, the Guide, and so on.

The tenth is that which designates action along with an added aspect, such as the Glorious, the Generous, and the Benign. The Glorious and the Generous both imply generosity along with essential nobility. The Benign implies action with gentleness.

No other Divine Names fall outside these ten categories, and you may apply them to the other Names we have not listed here. This illustrates how none of the Names are exact synonyms for one another, yet they all pertain to these well-known and defined categories. God knows best.



Theⁱ meanings of the Most Beautiful Names of God are combined within four phrases, which are known as "the enduring righteous deeds" (*al-bāqiyāt al-ṣāliḥāt*): Glory be to God (*Subḥāna Llāh*), Praise be to God (*al-Ḥamdu li-Llāh*), God is Greatest (*Allāh akbar*), and There is no god but God (*Lā ilāha illā Allāh*).

The first, "Glory be to God" (*Subḥāna Llāh*), means, in Arabic, to declare God's transcendence and negate all imperfections and flaws in respect of His Essence and Attributes. Every Name of His that implies negation is included in this phrase, such as the All-Holy (*al-Quddūs*), meaning the One Who is pure of every flaw, or Peace, meaning the One who is devoid of every defect.

The second, "Praise be to God" (*al-Ḥamdu li-Llāh*), means to affirm all perfection for God's Essence and Attributes. Every Name of His that implies affirmation, such as the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful, the All-Hearing, or the All-Seeing, is included in this phrase. With *Subḥāna Llāh* we negate every flaw, and with *al-Ḥamdu li-Llāh* we affirm every perfection; and beyond what we affirm and negate lies something tremendous of which we are utterly unaware, and it is this that we acknowledge when we utter the third phrase.

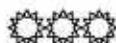
The third, ["God is Greatest" (*Allāh akbar*)], means that He is above all the things we can attribute to Him or negate from Him. This is the meaning of the Prophet's ﷺ words, "I cannot praise You enough; You are as You have praised Yourself" (Muslim 486). Every Name of His that is above what we can know, such as the Sublime or the Lofty, is included in this phrase. And since all this is true of God, there cannot be anything in existence that resembles Him or rivals Him. It is this that we affirm with the fourth phrase.

i This passage is found almost verbatim in Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī's *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-kubrā*, vol. 8, p. 220-222.

The fourth, ["There is no god but God"] (*Lā ilāha illā Allāh*); [this is so] because godhood means to be deserving of worship, and nothing deserves to be worshipped but one who possesses all the Attributes we have just described. Every Name of His that implies all of them in general, such as the One or the Lord of Majesty and Bounty, is included within this phrase. He deserves to be worshipped because of His incomparable and innumerable Attributes of beauty and perfection.

All of these four phrases can in turn be summed in one of them, "Praise be to God." Our Master Imam 'Ali عليه السلام said, "I could write so much commentary on 'Praise be to God' that a camel could barely carry it." To praise God means to affirm His perfection, or to deny His imperfection; to acknowledge one's inability to perceive Him, or to affirm His absolute singularity, which is the height of praise and laudation. The same can be said about "Praise be to God" as was said about all four phrases, for the definite article in *al-hamd* (literally, "the praise") means praise of all kinds, whether known to us or not, and so nothing we have said about them falls outside its scope; and none deserves godhood but one endowed with all this.

All this is part of the belief of every angel brought nigh and every Prophet sent forth, and no one denies it but those whom God forsakes to pursue their vain desires, whose waywardness is beyond all bounds, and who are rebellious toward their Lord; those covered by the degradation of being barred and banished from the glorious Presence. It is only fitting that those who are veiled from knowing Him and lauding Him in this life should be veiled from His generosity and beatific vision in the Next.





CHAPTER 13

HOLDING TO SOUND DOCTRINE

The meaning of doctrine (*i'tiqād*) is for an idea about a matter of the Unseen, drawn from knowledge or speculation, to become attached (*'aqd*) to the heart. Knowledge is firm doctrine that corresponds to reality.

One of the great masters said that knowledge is light. When it alights in the heart, its rays penetrate through to its object and land upon it, just as the light of the eye lands upon the object of vision. True doctrine is that which is devoid of such errors as denying God's Attributes; atheism; likening God to creation; corporealism; attributing modality, imperfection, incarnation, or integration to God; indifference to the Law; and so on. It must include the proper attribution of transcendence, magnificence, and glory to God, just as the Companions  did. Its proofs are in the Qur'ān, Sunna, and the consensus of the Community.

The individual must know that God is One, Only, Singular, and Independent in His Essence and Attributes, without likeness or peer in either. He does not share His kingdom. His Attributes do not undergo change or substitution. He is eternal and everlasting without beginning or end. He has always existed and always will. He sustains all things in existence without interruption. He has

always been and always will be endowed with the Attributes of Majesty and Beauty. There is no end to His glory, magnificence, and majesty.

He is not a body, nor is He corporeal. He is not a spirit, nor is He spiritual. He is not a delimited substance, nor a locus for substances. He is the Creator of all things, One, Independent, neither begetting nor begotten, utterly without equal. He is transcendent beyond motion, relocation, direction, and space. He is near to everything, and nearer to His servant than his own jugular vein; yet His nearness to creation is not like their nearness to one another, for He is near in a manner that befits Him.

Junayd, may God sanctify his spirit, was asked about nearness, and replied, "Near but not adhering; far but not separate. There is no modality to His nearness and His with-ness. There is nothing like Him, and nothing like His nearness and with-ness. He was, and there was nothing with Him; and He is now as He was."

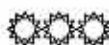


To understand God's "settling (*istiwā*) upon the Throne" in the literal sense would be to fall into corporealism; and to be in doubt as to that is to do the same. If one is certain that it is impossible for God to "settle" in a literal sense, the only option is to interpret it figuratively, which is the correct position. The same applies to God's "descending" (*nuzūl*), for to understand this literally as meaning physical movement would be to fall into corporealism. The correct position is to affirm that movement and relocation are impossible for God, which makes figurative interpretation unavoidable.

The avoidance of figurative interpretation of such passages, out of fear that it may give rise to dangerous beliefs, will only lead to doubt, delusion, and the misguidance of the masses. It will allow doubts to creep into the foundations of the religion, as

well as exposing certain verses of the Holy Book of God to false interpretations.

Praise be to God alone, this is the true and sound doctrine held to by all whose hearts are sound and free of innovation and from the influences of Satan's whisperings and the soul's misgivings; those who are beautified by God-consciousness, aided by guidance, refined by piety, and nourished by the remembrance of God. God knows best.





CHAPTER 14

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The seven affirmative Attributes are: Life, Knowledge, Will, Omnipotent Power, Hearing, Sight, and Speech. Each of them is attached to an object, except for life, which is the wellspring of [all] perfections.

Knowledge is attached to all that is necessary, possible, or impossible. The necessary comprises the Essence and Attributes of God, Exalted is He; the possible is all that can exist; and the impossible is all that cannot exist.

Will is attached to selection, which means tipping the scale towards existence rather than nonexistence for a given possibility, according to what God wills to bring into being.

Omnipotent Power is attached to influence, which means existing something non-existent, or depriving something existent of existence. Without prior knowledge, the Will would not select; and without selection by the Will, Power would not exert influence.

Hearing is attached to anything that can be heard, whether it be eternal or ephemeral.ⁱ

ⁱ One would expect the author to say something analogous about Sight here; a copyist may have unintentionally omitted it.

Speech is attached to anything to which knowledge is attached.

All of these Attributes are sustained by the Essence of God Most High. They may be categorized into those that are attached to objects through exposure, such as Knowledge, Hearing, and Sight, and those that are attached without exposure or influence, such as Speech. Those with the broadest attachments are Knowledge and Speech; the one with the most specific attachment is Hearing; Sight falls in between.

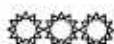
Subsistence, meaning the continuation of existence, is not an Attribute distinct from the Essence itself.

The Ash'arīs say that God is actively endowed with each of His Attributes: He is Alive through having life, All-Knowing through having knowledge, All-Powerful through having power, Willing through having will, and so on. The Qadarīs say that He is Alive through His Essence, All-Powerful through His Essence, Willing through His Essence, and so on, which is mistaken.

The naturalists say that fire burns, water quenches, and food satiates because it is in their nature to do so, and that the celestial bodies exert natural influence, and so on for all matters of causality. The truth is that it is God's power that exerts influence, and that material causes do not. God knows best.

The Ash'arīs say that these seven Attributes are supplementary to the meaning of the Essence, and that they are immutable as entities and properties. The meaning of their being immutable as entities is that they are not the Essence itself, nor outside it. Other rightly-guided masters say that they are attributions and descriptors that are immutable as properties but nonexistent as entities, meaning that they are not something supplementary to the meaning of the Essence. Other masters say that the Names and Attributes are descriptors and attributions that refer back to a single source, for there can be no multiplicity of entities in addition to the holy Essence, as some rationalists devoid of knowledge of God

have claimed. If they were supplementary entities that He required in order to be Himself, this would make them His cause. In that case, they would have to either be identical with Him—which cannot be, for a thing cannot be its own cause; or else distinct from Him—which also cannot be, for God cannot be caused by something other than Him. That would make Him dependent, and it is impossible for God to be dependent. Therefore the Names and Attributes cannot be supplementary entities. Strive to understand this; and praise be to God alone.





CHAPTER 15

THE MEANING, LEGAL STATUS, AND EFFECT OF SINCERITY AND OSTENTATIONⁱ

Our teachers say that there are two kinds of sincerity: sincerity in action, and sincerity in seeking reward. Sincerity in action means to desire to draw close to God Most High, to have reverence for His command, and to respond to His call. It is instigated by correct doctrine. The opposite of this kind of sincerity is hypocrisy, which means to draw nearer to anything other than God.

Sincerity in seeking reward means [to evince] desire for a good Afterlife by performing good deeds. The opposite of this kind of sincerity is ostentation, which is to perform righteous deeds out of desire for worldly benefit. This applies whether this desire is directed towards God Most High or towards other people, for ostentation is a question of the object of desire, not its source.

Sincerity in action transforms the deed into an act of drawing nearer to God. Sincerity in seeking reward makes the deed acceptable and its reward plentiful. Hypocrisy nullifies the deed

i This passage seems to be condensed from *Minhāj al-ʿābidīn*, attributed to al-Ghazālī but in fact, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, authored by his teacher Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī al-Musaffir of Andalusia (*Kitāb al-musāmarāt*, 1/159).

and prevents it from being an act of drawing near. Ostentation renders the deed unacceptable.

You may ask what is the place of sincerity, and in which actions it is required. Some scholars say that actions may be divided into three categories.¹ One category comprises those in which both types of sincerity apply, namely inherently outward worship. Another comprises those in which sincerity of seeking reward applies but sincerity of action does not, namely permitted things that are utilized to draw strength for worship. Our teacher said that if any basic act of worship could conceivably be dedicated to anything other than God then sincerity of action applies to it, while most inward worship involves sincerity of action.

As for sincerity in seeking reward through inward worship, our teacher used to say that if one engages in an inward act of worship while hoping that God Most High will reward him for them with worldly benefit, this is a kind of ostentation. It seems to me, therefore, that most inward acts of worship can involve both kinds of sincerity. The same applies to voluntary worship, for which one must always evoke both kinds of sincerity when beginning them.

As for permitted actions done to draw strength for worship, they can involve sincerity in seeking reward but not sincerity in action, for they are not in themselves acts of drawing nearer to God, but rather preparations for such actions.

Those are the contexts that call for sincerity, but what of its proper time? The answer is that sincerity in action must accompany the act and cannot come after it, whereas sincerity in seeking reward may come after it. Some of the learned say that the final moment of the act is particularly important, because once an act has been

i It is difficult to find three categories in what follows. The passage in *Minhāj al-ʿābidīn* adds "a category in which none of them apply, namely inward worship", but this is contradicted by everything that follows it. God knows best.

concluded—whether performed sincerely or ostentatiously—it is too late for that to be changed. God knows best.



In all actions, one must beware of ten things: hypocrisy, ostentation, mixed intention, expecting gratitude [for favors done], harassment,ⁱ resentment, self-regard, regret [over missed opportunities], indifference, and fear of people's criticism. Our teacher, may God have mercy on him, explained what the opposites of each of these harmful attributes are. The opposite of hypocrisy is sincerity in action for God; the opposite of ostentation is sincerity in seeking reward; the opposite of mixed intention is God-consciousness; the opposite of expecting gratitude is recognizing that the [good] deed belongs to God Most High; the opposite of harassment is safeguarding the deed from any flaws; the opposite of resentment is steadfast self-control; the opposite of self-regard is acknowledgment of God's favor; the opposite of regret is seizing [opportunities to do [good]]; the opposite of indifference is reverence for divine grace; and the opposite of fearing people's criticism is dread of God, Exalted is He.

Hypocrisy nullifies a deed and prevents it from being an act of drawing near [to God]. Ostentation renders a deed unacceptable. Demanding gratitude and harassment both annul charity altogether; some say they annul the multiplied reward for it. All agree that resentment nullifies a deed. Self-satisfaction nullifies the multiplied reward. Neglect and flippancy throttle a deed. You must rid yourself of all of these, for in them lies great peril. All success is from God.

i Reference to Q. 2:264: *O you who believe, do not annul your acts of charity with reminders of favors done or harassment, like one who spends his wealth to show off to people and believes not in God and the Last Day.*



CHAPTER 16

ON THE RIGHTS DUE TO THE PROPHET ﷺ; AND A REFUTATION OF THOSE WHO DEEM IT POSSIBLE THAT THE PROPHETS, GOD'S BLESSINGS AND PEACE BE UPON THEM, COULD COMMIT MINOR SINS

The first right owed to the Prophet ﷺ is to believe him in all that he conveyed and said, and for the assent of the heart to be matched by the testimony of the tongue that he is the Messenger of God to all mankind. The next is to follow him in all that he commanded and forbade, and to love him, be loyal to him, revere him, be dutiful to him, and invoke blessings upon him. All of this is obligatory, for it is part of what he ﷺ conveyed.

There is consensus in the [Muslim] Community that the Prophet ﷺ was divinely protected from Satan, who could do no harm to his person whether outwardly by actions or inwardly by temptation. He was also divinely protected from being ignorant of anything regarding God and His Attributes, or from lacking correct knowledge about anything at all regarding these matters. All of this was true after his Prophethood began, according to reason and consensus; and also before it began, according to tradition and transmission. Reason and revelation also affirm beyond doubt that he was also

protected from ignorance concerning any matter of the Law which he conveyed from his Almighty Lord by Revelation.

He was also protected from speaking untruths or breaking his word, whether intentionally or unintentionally, from the moment God made him a Prophet and sent him forth. Such a thing is inconceivable according to reason and by consensus, since it would undermine his miraculous nature. He was also protected from it before he became a Prophet.

He was protected also from committing major sins, by consensus, and from minor sins and blemishes too, according to the strongest position. Indeed, he was protected from so much as engaging in merely permitted things for any reason other than to show their lawfulness or to use them as means for obeying his Lord.

He was immune from error in all of his states, whether he was pleased or angry, serious or joking, healthy or sick. There is consensus that it was impossible for him to err or forget when conveying the message verbally, for that too would undermine his miraculous nature. It was possible for him to forget when conveying a message by action, provided that he immediately remembered and corrected it, in order to teach his Community what to do when they forget, so that they could follow his example in all aspects of his Law.

The reason why scholars make a distinction between conveying the message by action and by word is that his miraculous nature is based on truthfulness of speech, and so to utter an untruth even forgetfully would undermine it, while forgetting an action would not. Indeed, for him ﷺ it was a way of imparting knowledge and affirming law; as he ﷺ said, "I do not forget, but I am made to forget in order to establish a practice." Far from being a flaw, this enhanced the conveying of the message and complemented its blessing.

As for those of his ﷺ actions that were unrelated to conveying the message or explaining the rulings of the Law but concerned

his private worship and the remembrance of his heart, all the Sufis and masters of the science of the heart agree that it was impossible for him to err in them, forget them, overlook them, or be lax in them. The majority of scholars, however, deem them possible and consider them a natural result of the immense pressures of governing the Muslims, seeing to their affairs, and dealing with their enemies. Yet such slips could not be repeated or successive, but only occurred rarely. They did not in any way detract from his ﷺ status, or undermine his miraculous nature.

Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ says in *al-Shifā'*,ⁱ may God have mercy on him: "Those jurists, hadith masters, and theologians who deem that it is rationally possible for the Prophets, may God bless them and give them peace, to commit minor sins support this by citing the outward meaning of several passages from the Qur'ān and Hadith corpus. Yet if those same passages were understood in an entirely literal sense, it would force us to admit that the Prophets could commit major sins as well, and to violate consensus by affirming something that no Muslim would ever say. That is inadmissible, since every passage they cite has been debated by exegetes because of its various possible meanings, and there are statements from the earliest generations of Islam to the contrary of what they claim. Given that their position is not a matter of consensus, and the issue has long been a matter of debate for which there are proofs against their position and in the support of the opposing view, they are obliged to give it up and adopt the correct position. God knows best."

It was possible for the Prophet ﷺ to experience physical pain and discomfort, in order that his humanity be fully realized. But

i Much of the preceding passage is also derived from *al-Shifā' fi ta'rīf huqūq al-Mustafā*, the celebrated work describing the life, virtues and miracles of the Prophet ﷺ by Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ al-Yahṣūbi (d. 544/1149).

none of that reached his ۞ inner being, for at all times he bore witness to his Lord, and was consoled by Him.

All that we have said here concerning our Prophet Muḥammad ۞ applies equally to the other Prophets and the angels.



There were certain obligations, prohibitions, permissions, and distinctions that were specific to the Prophet ۞ alone and no other.

The obligations were: the *tahajjud*, *witr*, and *ḍuhā* prayers, the 'Īd sacrifice, holding council, asking his wives to choose their lot,ⁱ using the tooth-stick, standing against the enemy no matter how numerous they might be, and changing what was wrong.

The prohibitions were: writing; poetry; accepting charity or zakat; turning his gaze to what others possessed; deception in warfare; keeping a wife who wished to be divorced; eating leek, garlic, or onions; eating while reclining, though this is disputed and the soundest opinion is that it was only discouraged; marrying a free Christian or Jewish woman or a Muslim slave woman; performing the funeral prayer of someone who died owing debts, though this is disputed and the soundest position is that it was only a temporary prohibition; and removing his armor after donning it for war without first going to battle.

The permissions were: passing judgment on his himself and his family, and accepting his own testimony for both; taking a fifth of the *khumus* share of spoils; that if he wished to marry a woman, her husband would be required to divorce her; marrying without

i O Prophet, say to your wives: 'If you desire the present life and its adornment then come, and I will provide for you and release you in a gracious manner. But if you desire God and His Messenger and the Abode of the Hereafter, then God has indeed prepared an immense reward for the virtuous among you.' (Qur'ān 33:28-29)

dowry; marrying any woman who wished to give herself to him, with her statement to this effect constituting the marriage rite; taking food from others even if they needed it; claiming land that had been left uncultivated; passing judgment based solely on his knowledge, which was obligatory when someone meant him harm; that his ablution was not vitiated by sleep or touching [a woman] according to the soundest view; that his property was not inherited; that a divorced woman was obliged to accept his marriage proposal; that he could marry without a guardian's approval or witnesses; that he could marry more than four women, or more than nine according to the strongest view; that he could marry inside the Sacred Precinct; and that he could conduct a marriage unilaterally, whether for himself or someone else.ⁱ

The special distinctions were: that no one was permitted to marry those of his wives who outlived him, nor those he divorced after the marriage had been consummated, according to the soundest view, for they are the Mothers of the Faithful; that his ﷺ Law abrogated all previous laws, and will endure until the end of time; that his miraculous Book will never be substituted or corrupted, and will remain God's proof against His servants; that the entire earth was made a pure place of prayer for him; that he was granted five intercessions, including the greatest intercession; that he will be the first to be allowed to intercede; that he will be the first to be raised from his grave; that his Community is the best of all Communities, and will never be united upon falsehood; that his physical waste was pure, according to the soundest position, and could be used for blessing and healing; that he could see behind him as well as in front of him; that it was not permitted to call to him loudly when he was at home; that his voluntary prayer was

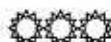
i The great Syrian jurist and hadith scholar Muhyī al-Dīn Yahyā al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277) says in *Rawḍat al-ṭālibīn* (7/9), "Most of these were not things that he ﷺ actually did, but only things that were permitted for him."

of equal merit whether performed seated or standing; that it was not permitted to call out to him by his name; and that his speech was made all-encompassing and precise.



In the Qur'ān God forbids offending against the Prophet ﷺ and curses those who do so. The Muslim Community is agreed that any Muslim who insults or slights him, whether directly or indirectly, should be put to death. What that means is to insult him directly, speak ill of him, find fault with any aspect of his person, character, religion, attributes, lineage, or say something allusive or ambiguous that amounts to insulting, demeaning, or belittling him. All of this is to insult him, which bears the penalty of death. The same applies to mocking him for any of the tribulations he suffered, or scoffing at any of the ordinary human experiences he had. This has been the consensus of the learned from the time of the Companions until now.

Ibn al-Mundhirⁱ said, may God have mercy on him, "All people of knowledge agree that insulting the Messenger of God ﷺ carries the penalty of death." Those who said so include Mālik, Aḥmad, Ishāq, and the school of Shāfi'ī, and it was also the apparent position of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddiq رضي الله عنه. In their view the offender's repentance cannot be accepted. Abū Ḥanīfa and his school, al-Thawrī, the Kufans, and al-Awzā'ī said much the same with regard to a Muslim offender, except that they said the offense constitutes apostasy. God knows best.



i A prominent jurist of the Shāfi'ī school (d. 318/930).



CHAPTER 17

RESISTING SATAN AND TEMPTATIONⁱ

To combat intrusive thoughts and resist Satan and his evils, one must first seek refuge with God. Then one must fight him in three ways. The first is to become acquainted with his machinations and deceptions. The second is to disparage his invitations so that they find no foothold in your heart. The third is to remember God always with your heart and your tongue; for the remembrance of God eats away at Satan as gangrene eats away at a man.

To become acquainted with Satan's machinations, one must learn the nature of the different types of intrusive thoughts. Intrusive thoughts have certain affects upon the heart that encourage a person towards action or inaction. All of them ultimately come from God, for He is the creator of all things; but they comprise four categories. The first is one that God causes to originate in the heart, which is simply called a thought-impulse (*khāṭir*). The second is the kind that accords with the person's nature, which is called a selfish desire (*hawā' al-nafs*). The third is the kind that occurs when Satan calls to one, which is called an insinuation

i This chapter again seems to be condensed from *Minhāj al-'ābidin*.

(*waswās*). The fourth is the kind through which God addresses the individual, which is called an inspiration (*ilhām*).

The thoughts that God causes to originate in the heart may be good and noble, to guide one to the truth; or they may be evil, as a test. The thoughts that come through the inspiring angel, however, are always good, for this angel is a guiding advisor sent for that purpose alone. The thoughts that come from Satan are always evil, designed to tempt, although they can be disguised as good thoughts in order to deceive and lead astray. The thoughts that come from the soul's desire are evil too, although they may attach to something good for some ulterior motive rather than for its own sake. Those are the different types of thoughts. In order to deal properly with them, you must be aware of three things.

Firstly, the scholars say, may God be pleased with them all, that if you wish to tell good thoughts from bad ones you must measure them against one of three standards. The first standard is to refer to the Law. If the thought accords with the Law, it is good. If it does not, even if only because it is doubtful or overly lenient, then it is evil. If you are unable to judge by this standard, then you must refer to the standard of the righteous. If the thought seems to live up to their example, it is good; if not, it is evil. If this standard is too difficult to judge by as well, you must refer to the standard of the soul and its desire. If the thought accords with the natural inclination of the soul, rather than towards its hope in God, then it is evil.

Secondly, if you wish to tell whether an evil thought is from Satan, from the soul, or from God, you must again consider three things. The first is that if the thought is stable and unchanging, it is from God or the soul's desire. If it shifts and wavers, it is from Satan. The second is that if the thought occurs after you commit a sin, it is from God as a punishment. If not, it is from your soul or Satan. The third is that if remembrance of God does not cause

it to weaken and diminish, it is from the soul's vain desire; but if remembrance does weaken it, it is from Satan.

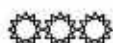
Third, if you wish to tell whether a good thought is from God or from the inspiring angel, you must again consider three things. The first is that if the thought is stable it is from God, while if it shifts it is from an angel, for the angel acts as an adviser. The second is that if it comes after effort and obedience on your part it is from God, but otherwise it is from the angel. The third is that if the thought relates to principles and inward worship it is from God, but if it relates to secondary matters and outward worship it is most usually from the angel. For most agree that the angel has no way of knowing what a person harbors within him.

As for a good deed that comes from Satan to lead one by degrees into evil, consider the action that it encourages you to do. Do you feel enthusiasm for it, but without humility? Do you perform it hastily rather than deliberately? Do you feel safe rather than fearful? Do you perform it with no consideration of its ultimate consequence, rather than with insight? If the answer is yes then the thought is from Satan, so shun it. If the answer is no then it is from God or the angel.

I would addⁱ that "enthusiasm" here means the individual's haste to perform an action without any insight or thought for its reward. Deliberateness is almost always praiseworthy. Fear here means concern that the act be performed properly, and that God accept it. Insight for the act's ultimate end means to be certain and sure that it is rightly-guided and virtuous; or it may mean to look hopefully to its reward in the Hereafter.

i The passage in *Minhāj al-ʿābidīn* attributes the previous paragraph to "our teacher", which explains this comment.

These are the three things of which you must be aware. Consider them well, for they are subtle and easily overlooked. All success is from God, and He is the Patron of guidance.





CHAPTER 18

THE TWENTY BLIGHTS OF THE TONGUEⁱ

The blights of the tongue are as follows: speaking about things that do not concern one, useless speech, delving into the futile, argument and debate, hostility, pretentious speech, foul speech and insults, cursing, poetry, joking, scorn and mockery, divulging other people's secrets, false promises, lying and false oaths, backbiting, tale-bearing, duplicity, praise, speaking carelessly, and asking ordinary people things about God Most High that are beyond their comprehension.

The extreme degree of speaking about what does not concern one is to say anything at all when to be silent would not incur sin or cause harm, whether immediately or later.

Useless speech means saying anything more than necessary when speaking about something that concerns one.

Delving into the futile means speaking about sins, such as telling tales about drunkenness and debauchery or the wicked behavior of tyrannical rulers, or discussing the teachings of heretics. It also includes speaking about things that went on among

ⁱ This chapter is a summary of Book Four of Part Three of *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, the Book of the Blights of the Tongue.

the Companions, may God be pleased with them all, in a manner designed to criticize some of them.

Argument means objecting to someone by pointing out the error in what he says or implies. Debate is a kind of argument centered on the defense and rebuttal of opinions.

Hostility is verbally attacking one's interlocutor and saying hurtful things to him that are not at all needed to support one's argument.

Pretentious speech means to employ outlandish expressions in an attempt to seem eloquent.

Foul speech means speaking about ugly things using direct language.

Cursing means declaring something to be distant from God, and therefore it is forbidden whether it be directed at a person, an animal, or an inanimate object, unless that thing be qualified by an attribute that clearly shows it to be distant from God. There are three such attributes: unbelief, heretical innovation, and shameless iniquity. It is permitted to curse these three things in general terms, but not to curse a particular human being one suspects of them, unless it is known for certain that he died in a state of unbelief, such as Pharaoh, Abū Jahl, or Abū Lahab. Otherwise, it is possible that the person may die, or may have died, in a state of Islam.

Poetry may be judged good or bad depending on its content, like speech in general.

Joking is forbidden unless it is mild and involves neither untruthfulness nor offense to others.

Scorn and mockery means referring to the flaws and defects of others in a humorous way. If it causes offense it is forbidden, but otherwise it is not.

Divulging another person's secret is forbidden if it causes harm, and shameful even if it does not.

Making false promises is one of the signs of hypocrisy. This applies if one promises with the intention of breaking the promise, or if one fails to keep one's promise for no good reason. If someone makes a promise and intends to keep it, but is then prevented from doing so by a valid excuse, he is not guilty of hypocrisy; yet one still must be very careful to avoid even the semblance of hypocrisy.

Lying and swearing false oaths are among the foulest of all sins. However, there are times when lying is permitted. Speech is a means to an end. If the end is good and it can be achieved either by telling the truth or by lying, then lying is forbidden. If it can be achieved by lying but not by telling the truth, then lying is permitted. If the end is something obligatory, then lying is likewise.ⁱ

Backbiting is forbidden, according to the Qur'ān, Sunna, and consensus, except for certain exceptions. Its definition is saying anything about your fellow Muslim in his absence that he would dislike if he heard about it, whether it pertains to some flaw in his religion or worldly life, or in his words, deeds, character, appearance, clothing, livelihood, lineage, home, or riding-mount. All of this is forbidden, whether it takes the form of a word, a deed, a gesture, an allusion, or a euphemism.

Backbiting has several motivations, some of which affect the masses while others affect those with religious and scholarly vocations. Among the masses, backbiting is generally caused by anger, rancor, envy, eagerness to join one's peers in mocking and disparaging others, pretension, competition, conceit, projection of one's faults onto others, or the attempt to preemptively discredit someone who knows one's flaws and may reveal them to others.

As for those with religious and scholarly vocations, they often fall into backbiting by describing a person's wicked deeds out of

i In the *Ihyā'* al-Ghazālī gives the example of lying to a prospective murderer by telling him that one does not know where his intended victim is.

a feeling of anger for God's sake or to express their incredulity at the way people behave. They may even mention a person's sin out of mercy for him, because they feel sorry for him and his wretched state. This is one of the most obscure and subtle causes of backbiting. Satan whispers to the unwary scholar that anger for God's sake is a good thing, after all, and so he may be excused for mentioning the sinner's name when castigating his sin. Yet in fact there are only a few specific situations when mentioning the sinner's name is unavoidable. These are: when reporting injustice to the authorities, when asking for a legal opinion, when seeking help to redress a wrong, when warning others about someone's misconduct, and when referring to a person by a nickname by which he is commonly known and which alludes to some flaw of his. These fiveⁱ are the exceptions to the general rule about backbiting.

The remedy for backbiting is to remember that by backbiting your brother you are calling down God's wrath upon yourself and robbing yourself of your good deeds, which will be taken from your account and placed in his. Repentance from backbiting is rooted in knowledge, regret, renunciation, the resolve never to repeat it, and asking forgiveness of those you have backbitten unless this is impractical—in which case you must pray for them.

Tale-bearing is also forbidden according to the Qur'ān, Sunna, and consensus. Its definition is to go around telling people what other people have been saying, for the purpose of stirring up discord. This applies whether or not the person whose words you transmit would like what you say about him. Its motivation is either to cause harm for the person whose words you transmit, or to ingratiate yourself with the person you tell about it, or simply to delve into the futile.

i Al-Ghazālī lists six in the *Iḥyā'*, namely these five plus "when the person lives in utter debauchery, openly and without shame."

The remedy for the sin of tale-bearing is to call to mind the harm it causes and avoid it by stilling one's tongue. Repentance from it is rooted in knowledge, regret, renunciation, and the resolve never to repeat it.

If someone should come to you bearing tales, you are obliged to do six things. You must not believe what he says; you must tell him to desist; you must hate him for God's sake, for he is hateful in God's sight; you must not pass on what he says to others; you must not go prying into the affairs of the one about whom he speaks; and you must not think ill of that person, for thinking ill of a Muslim is just as bad as speaking ill of him. What it means is to judge your fellow Muslim guilty of evil without having any knowledge of this.

Duplicity means to go back and forth between two people who are at odds with each other passing on what they say with the intention of sowing discord, or to act in a friendly manner with each of them as though one is on their side, or to speak kindly to one of them and then speak ill of him after leaving his presence. All of this is duplicity. In such a situation the proper thing to do is to be silent or to support the one who is in the right, whether one be in his presence or that of his rival.

Praise can in certain situations be forbidden. There are six things that make it harmful: four in the one who gives praise and two in the one who receives it. Of the former, the first is to praise so extravagantly that one strays into untruths. The second is to fall into ostentation by displaying love for the object of praise that one does not actually feel, or to say things about him that one does not actually believe, which is both ostentatious and hypocritical. The third is to say things without being certain that they are true, which amounts to lying and to praising one whom God has not praised, wherein lies ruin. The fourth is to praise a tyrant

or an open sinner, which is unlawful because God is angry when a wicked man is praised.

On the side of the one who is praised, there are two harmful things. The first is that it may cause him to become proud and self-satisfied, wherein lies ruin. The second is that if he is praised for his virtue he may become so delighted and pleased with himself that he forgets to devote himself to the Hereafter. That is why the Messenger of God ﷺ said to someone who lavished praise on another person, "You might as well have severed his neck!"

If praise is free from all these harms it is unobjectionable and may even be commendable. This is why the Messenger of God ﷺ praised the Companions by saying, "If the faith of Abū Bakr were weighed against the faith of all other beings, it would be the heavier," and saying, "Umar, if I had not been sent, you would have been." What praise could be greater than that? Yet it was rooted in honesty and insight, and they were above any risk of becoming proud or self-satisfied. Likewise he ﷺ said, "I am the master of the Children of Adam, without boasting"; that is, "I do not say this to boast, as others might." For the Prophet ﷺ took pride in God and his nearness to Him alone, not in being placed ahead of any other child of Adam ﷺ.

Speaking carelessly means, for example, saying that it rained because of a certain star, or calling grapes *karm*,ⁱ and other forbidden things.

Asking ordinary people things about God that are beyond their comprehension means, for example, asking about God's Attributes or His Speech, or whether its letters are created or uncreated. It is blameworthy to ask them about such things, because the question may confuse them and lead them into falsehood. God knows best.

i "Do not call grapes *karm*, for the *karm* is the heart of the believer" (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 2247). *Karm* is related to *karam*, "nobility."



CHAPTER 19

GUARDING THE STOMACHⁱ

The stomach is the source of strength for the limbs, and whatever good or evil they do arises in it. It is therefore essential, if you have any aspiration for worshipping God, to protect it from what is unlawful, what is doubtful, and what is superfluous.

Sufficient reason for avoiding unlawful and doubtful food is found in three things. The first is that they may lead one to Hell. The second is that a person who consumes unlawful or doubtful food will be rejected and denied the grace to engage in worship, for only the pure-hearted are fit to serve God. Does not God forbid that a person in major ritual impurity enter His House, or that a person in minor ritual impurity touch His Book, though neither of them are sinners? How, then, could someone nourished with unlawful and doubtful things aspire to service and remembrance of God? He can never hope to do so.

The third is that anyone who consume unlawful and doubtful things is deprived of goodness, and any good deeds he does will be rejected, so that he gains nothing from them but weariness.

i This appears to be an abridgement of the chapter with the same title in *Minhāj al-'ābidin*.

The best definition of the unlawful is that if you are certain, or very confident, that something belongs to someone else or is forbidden by the Law, it is unlawful. If you are not sure whether it is lawful or unlawful, it is doubtful. Abstaining from the unlawful is absolutely obligatory, while abstaining from the doubtful is a matter of God-consciousness and scrupulousness. A principle in such matters is that there are two rulings: the ruling of the Law and outward appearances, and the ruling of scrupulousness and truth. The ruling of the Law is that you may take whatever God gives you as long as it appears to be good, and you need not enquire further unless you have reason to think that it is stolen or unlawful in substance. The ruling of piety is that you should not take anything from anyone without first looking into it thoroughly and ascertaining that there is nothing doubtful about it.

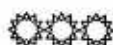
You may object that this seems to imply that scrupulousness is contrary to the Law. However, the truth is that scrupulousness is part of the Law, and that both of them are essentially the same; but the Law has two rulings: what is permitted, and what is best and most cautious. We call what is permitted the ruling of the Law, and what is best and most cautious the ruling of scrupulousness. God knows best.

When it comes to the amount of the lawful that is superfluous to one's needs, there are three categories.

The first category is seeking to amass a great deal of it in order to show off and make a proud display. Anyone who does so is outwardly blameworthy and inwardly at risk of being condemned to Hell, for such conduct is sinful and the Revelation gives stern warnings to those who pursue it.

The second category is to obtain lawful things to satisfy one's appetite and for no other reason. This too is an evil thing for which one may expect to be held to account.

The third category is to take as much of the lawful as one needs to gain sufficient strength to worship God Almighty, and no more. This is where virtue and good conduct lie, and such a person is beyond reproach and will surely be rewarded and praised. God knows best.





CHAPTER 20

THE RUSES AND DECEPTIONS OF SATAN

He said,ⁱ may God Most High have mercy on him:

Satan employs his ruses and deception against the child of Adam, regarding the matter of obedience to God, in seven ways. First he simply tells him not to perform acts of obedience. If God protects him from that, he tells him to procrastinate. If God saves him from that too, he tells him to rush. If God spares him from that, he tells him to perform the act ostentatiously. If God shields him from that, he attempts to make him feel self-satisfied. If God thwarts that too, he tells him to strive inwardly and promises him that God will make his righteousness visible outwardly, hoping that this will make him proud. If the person rejects that and is content for God alone to know about him, he will escape this ruse. If all these stratagems fail, Satan will tell him, "You have no need for all these [good] actions, for if you were created for salvation it will not matter if you cease to act; and if you were created for damnation it makes no difference what you do." If God protects him from that, he will say, "I am a servant, and the servant must do as his

i This appears to be the compiler of the treatise speaking, introducing his summary of sections from *Minhāj al-'ābidīn* on Satan and the self.

master commands, and his master may rule as he pleases." Then he will be saved by the grace of God; otherwise, he will be ruined.

Being Wary of the Self (Nafs)

He said, may God have mercy on him:

The fourth impedimentⁱ is the self. You must be cautious of this self, for it is the most dangerous of all foes and the most difficult to deal with; for it is an enemy from within. If the thief is a member of the household, he is hard to catch and can do great damage. The self is also a beloved enemy, and every person is blind to the faults of the one he loves, and can barely see his own faults at all. The way to deal with the self is to bridle it with God-consciousness and scrupulousness, so that it is made obedient.

Only three things can tame the self and break its desires. The first is to deny it its appetites; the second is to burden it with much worship; and the third is to ask the help of God and beseech Him. For there is no way to escape from its evil without His aid.

Which Deeds of the Heart Will One Be Held to Account For?ⁱⁱ

The heart passes through four stages before any action is carried out by the body. First comes thought, then inclination, then conviction, and finally resolve upon action.

Thought, which is the inner discourse of the self, is not held to account for because it is not subject to free will. The same applies to inclination and the stirring of the self's appetite, for they too

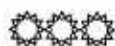
i In *Minhāj al-ʿābidīn* the author lists four impediments that the disciple must overcome: the world, mankind, Satan, and the soul. This passage is an abridgement of the section on the fourth.

ii This passage is an abridgement of the similarly-titled section in Book One of Part Three of the *Ihyāʾ*, the Book of the Marvels of the Heart.

are not governed by free will. This is what the Prophet ﷺ meant when he said, "God has pardoned my Community for the discourse of their selves." The discourse of the self is the stream of thoughts that run through the mind without giving rise to action. Aspiration and resolve are not considered to be part of this discourse.

The third stage, conviction, is the heart's belief that it ought to carry out the deed in question. This wavers between compulsion and free will, sometimes one and sometimes the other. It is only held to account for when it results from free will.

The fourth, resolve upon action, is held to account for. However, if the action is not carried out then the outcome depends on the reason for this. If the person refrains from the action out of fear of God and regret for his intent, it is recorded as a good deed to his account. If he is merely prevented from carrying it out by some obstacle, or abstains from it for some reason other than Godfearing, it is recorded as a bad deed. The resolve to act is itself a voluntary act of the heart, as is clearly proven by the hadith (Bukhārī 6672; Muslim 2888) in which our Master the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "If two Muslims fight each other with their swords, both the killer and the one killed will be in Hell." Someone said, "Messenger of God, this is understandable for the killer, but why the one killed too?" He replied, "He wanted to kill the other." This clearly shows that such a person would go to Hell for his intention alone, even though he was killed unjustly. How, then, could anyone think that he will not be held to account for his intention and resolve? He will be taken to account for everything that results from his heart's free will, unless he expiates it with a good deed. Nullifying one's previous intention by regretting it is a good deed, which is recorded as such. Failing to carry out one's intention because one is impeded from doing so is not a good deed.





CHAPTER 21

THE RIGHTS OF GODⁱ

The rights that every individual owes to God are of two kinds: obligations which must be fulfilled, and prohibited things which must be abstained from. Fulfilling an obligation is a matter of God-consciousness, and so is abstaining from something unlawful. To do either is to attain for oneself its worldly and Next-Worldly consequences: avoiding evil in this life and the Next, and enjoying the bliss of Paradise and God's goodly approval.

There is no way to draw nearer to God except by obeying Him, which means to do what He obliges and encourages, and to abstain from what He forbids and discourages. God-consciousness in this regard lies in giving precedence to what He obliges over what He encourages, and to [avoiding] what He forbids over [avoiding] what He discourages. Many ignorant people do the opposite, thinking that they are drawing nearer to God by doing so when in fact they are only getting further away from Him. One of them may neglect an obligation because he is too preoccupied with something that is merely encouraged. Another may engage in something unlawful in

i This section appears almost verbatim in a chapter with the same name in al-'Izz Ibn 'Abd al-Salām's *Maqāṣid al-rī'āya li-buqūq Allāh*.

his attempt to avoid something that is merely discouraged. Many a person performs actions that are outwardly obedient, while his heart harbors ostentation, rancor, envy, pride, and self-regard, as though he were doing God a favor by obeying Him.

God-consciousness is of two kinds. The first pertains to the heart and concerns firstly what is obligatory, such as sincerity in action and faith, and secondly the avoidance of what is forbidden, such as ostentation or reverence for idols. The second pertains to the external body, such as what the eye looks at, what the hand grasps, where the feet walk, and what the tongue utters. If God-consciousness is sound it will produce scrupulousness, which means abstaining from apparently harmless things lest they should cause one to fall into harm. God knows best.

Modes and Degrees of God-Consciousness; Four Vices and Four Virtuesⁱ

All the good things of this world and the Next are embodied in a single attribute: God-consciousness (*taqwā*). Observe its mentions in the Qur'ān, and note how often it is linked to a good thing or to a promise of reward or felicity. God-consciousness in matters of worship has three foundations.

The first is to receive grace and aid from God in order to be able to act. This is vouchsafed to the God-conscious, as the Qur'ān says: *God is with those who are God-fearing* (Qur'ān 2:194). The second is to rectify the action and correct its flaws in order to make it complete. This is also granted to the God-conscious, as the Qur'ān says: *He will set right your deeds for you* (Qur'ān 33:71). The third is that the action be accepted. This is also granted

i This section appears to be abridged from the discourse on God-consciousness in *Minhāj al-'abidīn*.

to the God-conscious, as the Qur'ān says: *God accepts only from the God-fearing* (Qur'ān 5:27).

Worship, then, revolves around these three: grace, righteousness, and acceptance. God has promised all this in return for God-consciousness, and will gift it to those who have this consciousness whether they ask for it or not. God-consciousness is the supreme aim, the goal of all goals.

According to our teachers, the definition of God-consciousness is to cleanse the heart of sin that you have not yet committed, so that your resolve to abstain from it becomes a shield (*wiqāya*) between you and sin.ⁱ When your heart becomes habituated to this, you can rightly be called God-conscious. It is also said that God-consciousness means repentance from sin and resolving never to return to it.

God-consciousness has three stations: being wary of idolatry, being wary of heretical innovation, and being wary of sin.

There are two kinds of evil: inherent, which means that which is forbidden outright, such as unambiguous sin; and non-inherent, which means that which a person forbids himself out of courtesy before God, such as the excessive consumption of lawful things to satisfy the appetites. Avoiding the former is obligatory God-consciousness, for which one may be punished if he neglects it. Avoiding the latter is meritorious God-consciousness, for which one ought to rebuke oneself if he neglects it. The former is the lower level of God-consciousness, the station of uprightness. The latter is the higher level. If an individual is able to abstain from both sin and excess, his God-consciousness becomes complete. This means perfect scrupulousness, which is the basis of the whole matter of religion.

ⁱ In the passage in *Minhāj al-ābidin*, the author explains here that *taqwā* is related to the word *wiqāya*, meaning a shield or protective barrier.

It is essential to practice proper supervision of the five chief body parts: the eyes, the ears, the tongue, the stomach, and the heart. One must be careful to look after their welfare and protect them from anything that may cause harm, whether it be unlawful, excessive, or wasteful. If they are protected, the rest of the body most likely will be as well. To do this is to fulfil God's right to God-consciousness with one's entire body.

In their discourses concerning this matter the sages, may God be pleased with them all, have listed seventy praiseworthy traits as well as their opposite blameworthy ones, and just as many necessary and vital deeds. After examining and reflecting on them all, we have condensed them down to fundamental principles that are necessary for the treatment of the heart. These comprise four vices that corrupt the heart, and four opposing virtues that rectify it. The four vices are having long-term hopes, haste, envy, and pride. The four virtues are restricted hopes, deliberateness in all affairs, goodwill towards one's fellow creatures, and humility and modesty. These are the principles that determine whether the heart is healthy or corrupt. Do your utmost to rid yourself of these vices and to attain these virtues. Then you will have made sufficient preparations, and you will achieve the goal, God willing.

Having long-term hopes impedes all that is good and attracts all that is evil. It is the blight that draws mankind into every tribulation. If you cherish such hopes, you will suffer four consequences:

The first is neglect of obedience [to God] and laziness, for you will be forever procrastinating. The second is failure to repent at the first opportunity, for you will put this off too. The third is that your hopes will draw you into desiring and coveting the world, for you will be forever wondering and worrying, "What shall I eat, what shall I wear?" The least one can say of this is that it distracts the heart, wastes time, and gives rise to anxiety. The fourth is that your heart will harden and you will forget the Hereafter;

for as long as you expect to live a long life, you will entertain no thoughts of death or the grave, never mind the Afterlife. The more your thoughts remain concentrated on the world, the harder your heart will grow. Hence God says, *So much time passed over them that their hearts were hardened* (Qur'ān 57:16). The heart can only be softened and purified by remembrance of death, the grave, and the Hereafter.

Long-term hope is defined as the assumption that one will live until a given time in the future. Restricted hope, on the contrary, is defined as the awareness that one's future depends entirely on the will of God, and that one must not make any definitive statements about it without acknowledging that it is subject to God's will and knowledge, and also making one's desire for the future conditional upon one's welfare. It is to say, "I hope to do this—if God wills it, and if He knows that it is good for me." If you confidently expect to live for another breath or another moment, and feel certain that you will, then you are guilty of having long-term hopes. This is a sin on your part, for it amounts to making a decisive pronouncement about something that can only be a mystery to you. If you acknowledge that it is subject to the will and knowledge of God by saying, "I will live, God willing", then you have successfully minimized your expectation by refraining from being too confident about it. You must remember this in your heart always until it becomes firmly rooted there and the heart becomes altogether committed to it. Strive to understand this.

Expectant hope is of two kinds: that of the masses, and that of the elite. The hope of the masses is the desire to remain in the world to amass wealth and enjoyment. This is a sin, and is countered by restricting one's hopes. The hope of the elite is to desire to remain alive long enough to complete a righteous deed—which is something doubtful, since one cannot be certain that one's welfare lies in completing it. It may be that an individual would be better

off not beginning or completing a particular good work, and that his welfare lies in not undertaking it. Therefore when beginning a prayer, a fast, or any other act, you should not expect to complete it, for that is not yours to know. You should make your intention contingent upon the will of God and your own welfare, so that you avoid having long-term hopes.

The opposite of long-term hopes, according to the learned, is praiseworthy intention, which they define in general terms as forming the decisive intention to undertake a given action before any other, and hoping to complete it, while leaving the matter to God's will.

You may ask why it is permitted to be decisive about beginning the action, yet it is necessary to defer its completion to God's will. The answer is that the incipience of the act is not in doubt, for it is immediate and not delayed until the future. The completion is what is in doubt, for it is yet to come. Indeed it is doubly doubtful, for not only do you not know if you will arrive at the end; you are also unsure as to whether or not it would be in your best interest to do so. If all of this is borne in mind when formulating the intention, it will be praiseworthy and free of having long-term hopes and its dire consequences. God knows best.

Safety from having long-term hopes lies in the remembrance of death and how sudden it can be, how it may come at any time. Bear all this in mind, for it is sorely needed. Do not waste your time in pointless chatter; and know that all success comes from God.



The next vice is haste and impatience, which causes one to miss one's goals and fall into sin. The backbone of worship is scrupulousness, which in essence means to observe everything carefully and thoroughly, whether it be food, drink, clothing, speech, or

action. If one is always hasty and never deliberate and diligent, he will not pause to consider things in the manner he ought to. He will eat whatever he finds, and so consume unlawful and doubtful things. He will say whatever comes to mind, and so fall into error. He will be devoid of piety in all his affairs; and what good is worship without piety? You must strive to do away with this vice; and all success is from God.

The definition of haste is the heart's tendency to act on the first impulse that arises without hesitation. Its opposite is deliberateness, which means the heart's tendency to be cautious and deliberate about following its impulses. Hesitation is opposed to recklessness; the difference between hesitation and deliberateness is that hesitation comes before action begins, so that every element of the action is given its proper due.



The next vice is envy, which ruins obedience, encourages disobedience, leads to unnecessary toil and anxiety, and makes the heart blind. It is enough to see the error and wretchedness of the envious man when one considers that he opposes God's blessing, resents His Will, and begrudges His Decree.

Envy means to desire that your Muslim brother be deprived of God's blessing even though it is good for him. If you do not wish to see him deprived of it but only desire to have the like of it yourself, then it is jealousy rather than envy. If you want it to be taken from him because you know that it is not good for him, then it is protectiveness, not envy. That is the difference between those three traits.

The opposite of envy is goodwill, which means to hope that your Muslim brother will continue to enjoy God's blessing as long as it is good for him. If you are uncertain of whether or not it is

good for them, you must not desire to see them deprived of it, nor desire that they retain it, but simply leave the matter to God. In this way you will avoid envy while retaining the benefit of goodwill.

The security of goodwill, which guards against envy, lies in remembering that God expects you to be the ally of every Muslim. Ultimately, it lies in remembering the tremendous worth of the believers in God's sight and the great favors that He has in store for them in the Hereafter, as well as the great blessings that you yourself enjoy in your religious and worldly life. All success is from God.



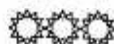
The final vice is pride, which is the great destroyer. Observe what God says of Iblīs: *He refused and waxed proud, and became a disbeliever* (Qur'ān 2:34). The definition of pride is the inclination to elevate and magnify the self. To "wax proud" means to pursue that inclination and everything that contradicts humility. Each of these has one sense pertaining to the masses and another pertaining to the spiritual elite. Humility for the masses means to be content with modest clothing, shelter, and other such things. Pride means to set one's sights above that. [Humility for the elite means to train the soul to accept the truth from anyone, whether lowly or noble. Pride means disdaining to do so],ⁱ which is a terrible sin.

The security of general humility lies in remembering your origin and your final destination, as well as your present state and all the vices and impurities that sully you. The security of elite humility lies in remembering the fate that awaits one who strays from the truth.

i What is between brackets has been added from *Minhāj al-ʿābidīn*. The copyist or editor must have erroneously omitted it here, as otherwise the elaboration about the elite is missing.

THE MEADOW OF SEEKERS

This ought to be sufficient for anyone possessed of insight; and all success is from God.





CHAPTER 22

THE MEANING OF GOOD AND BAD CHARACTER

All felicity, and all the goodness that will endure with you if your ship sinks, may be found in two things. The first is a sound heart purified of all but God, as the Almighty says: *But only him who comes to God with a sound heart* (Qur'ān 26:89). The second is a heart filled with direct knowledge of God, which was the purpose for which the world was created and the Messengers were sent. Good character is the combination of these two, and I do not know of any trait that surpasses it. Therefore God praises His Prophet ﷺ for it, saying, *Truly you are of a tremendous character* (Qur'ān 68:4). He also says, *To Him ascends the good word, and He uplifts the righteous deed* (Qur'ān 35:10). "The good word" is realization of Unity and gnosis, and "the righteous deed" is purity of heart, which is lifted up to their level. Uplifting means for the heart to be present and impacted by them, so that it yields with humility, stillness, and awe. It is then that it becomes close to God.

As for the true nature of good character, know that man has an inner form, which is what the Prophets and Messengers were sent to make straight, pure, and balanced, so that praiseworthy traits emerge from it naturally, without the need for thought. That

is the true meaning of good character; and poor character is just the opposite.

All praiseworthy and blameworthy traits result from three attributes, which are like the mothers of all of them.

The first attribute is the intellect, which is strengthened and balanced by knowledge and wisdom. True wisdom means the ability to recognize truth from falsehood, fact from fiction, and good from bad. The second attribute is anger, which was created to repel harm. Its perfection and balance lies in its compliance to wisdom: it becomes agitated or calm according to wisdom's dictate, like a well-trained hound. The third attribute is appetite, which attracts benefit. It was created to be obedient to the intellect, and so it too draws its virtue and balance from its compliance to wisdom.

What is required of character is that it be balanced and adhere to the middle way; God says, *Do not keep your hand chained to your neck, nor outspread it completely* (Qur'ān 17:29). The fourth pillar of good character, therefore, is that these three attributes be kept in balance.

Let us consider some examples of balance in these attributes. The faculty of intellect has two extremes and a middle. The middle is the best part of it, which is called wisdom. When it is balanced, it leads to contemplation, judiciousness, and awareness of the subtleties of action and the hidden blights of the soul. Its upper extreme produces scheming, treachery, cunning, and the like. Its lower extreme produces foolishness, idiocy, and madness. Foolishness means lack of experience or naivety; idiocy means pursuing reasonable ends by unreasonable means; madness means the total corruption of both the ends and the means.

The balanced state of the irascible faculty is called courage, which gives rise to nobility, selflessness, forbearance, and loyalty. Its upper extreme produces pride, self-satisfaction, contentiousness,

and the like. Its lower extreme produces degradation, despair, and resentment of fulfilling obligations.

The balanced state of the appetitive faculty is called temperance. It gives rise to generosity, patience, piety, supportiveness, and moderation. Its upper extreme produces avarice, greed and the like; its lower extreme produces envy, resentment, fault-finding, and so on.

Hence the chief virtues, the mothers of good character, are wisdom, courage, temperance, and finally equity, which complements the other three. All other virtues are branches of these four. No one has attained perfection in them all except our Master the Messenger of God ﷺ. All success is from God.

The True Nature of Humility

The humble man is adorned with the qualities of God Most High, which is nobility enough in the Hereafter. This is the meaning of the Prophet's ﷺ words, "When someone humbles himself before God, God elevates him."¹

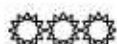
Humility (*tawāḍuʿ*) means to restrain oneself from excess and negligence, so that one is neither proud nor base. Its true nature is to yield to the Truth meekly and readily; the Truth here means both God and His command. Its culmination is that one does not feel humiliation (*dhull*) when one is praised, nor does it pain one to be criticized, for one is aware of the wisdom of God and the unity of His actions; a servant does not feel humiliated when he stands before his Lord. That is the way of those who truly recognize God's oneness. The ordinary humble man sees some value in himself and therefore downplays it, while one who truly recognizes God's oneness does not see any value in himself that he could downplay. The humble man has control over his voluntary actions and is neither proud nor base, though he may feel humiliation involuntarily.

The way of the saints is contentment and delight, for [such a person] follows the course of God's Will, Knowledge, and Decree. He feels no humiliation, being absorbed in God's Decree and the beauty of His Actions. From his perspective, humiliation is only for the ignorant, arrogant man who can see no further than his own actions, so that the more debased he becomes the more his pride grows.

The knowers of God Most High, for their part, do not bear witness to anything but Him, nor do they find fault in any of His decrees. They recognize that any humiliation that comes their way is but a sign of His generosity.

Some authorities, may God Most High cover them with His Mercy, have said that gnosis exists only in the hearts of the humble, those for whom humility has become an essential attribute. They are totally subsumed in God's decree and regard. If they were to be lifted up to the heavens, they would not be made any more perfect than they are; if they were lowered to the deepest depths, they would not suffer any loss. They have surrendered their will and desire entirely, for they know that absolute perfection lies in what God decrees for them, and they receive constant increase from Him. That is the station of those nearest God. As for ordinary righteous folk, their humility is in the measure of their knowledge of themselves and their Lord.

The sign of humility is that one does not feel any disdain towards the truth when confronted with it. Anyone who feels such disdain is guilty of pride, which is a terrible sin. God knows best.





CHAPTER 23

THE MEANING OF CONTEMPLATION

Contemplation (*fikr, tafakkur*) is preceded by hearing, attention, and remembrance, and followed by knowledge. One who hears pays attention; one who pays attention remembers; one who remembers contemplates; and one who contemplates knows. This knowledge may then be followed by action, if it is possible to act upon it, or else may simply be known for its own sake, in which case its fruit is none other than happiness, which is the ultimate objective.

The true meaning of hearing is to benefit from what one hears, whether it be a nugget of wisdom, an admonition, or the like. This requires that one listen. The Law requires us to listen to certain things in order to obtain the knowledge that we are obliged to possess. There are things that it encourages us to listen to, others that it discourages, and others that it forbids outright.

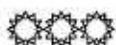
The true meaning of attentiveness is for the heart to be aware of goodness. The sign that a person is attentive is that he is roused from his indolent daydreaming. This is obligatory at once in the case of divine commandments and prohibitions that apply in the immediate moment, which depends on circumstances.

Remembrance means the repetition of a fact in the heart so that it is firmly retained there.

Contemplation means to combine together two objects of knowledge that are relevant to the knowledge you are seeking. It is essential that these two objects be beyond doubt, and that the heart not be occupied by anything else but them. Then they must be subjected to intense scrutiny, until the heart's inclination is transported to the higher plane through concentration on these two objects of knowledge. This is what is called remembrance.

Remembrance applies to matters of belief, speech, action, and inaction. It is obligatory for certain things and forbidden for others, such as remembrance of sin if there is risk that this will lead to temptation. The attainment of a third object of knowledge by means of remembrance of the other two is what is called contemplation. Contemplation is obligatory in situations of doubt and uncertainty, and for the treatment of those ailments of the heart that must be cured.

As for knowledge, it may be divided into five categories. The first is the obligatory knowledge of the foundations of faith in God, His Angels, His Scriptures, His Messengers, and the Last Day. The second is knowledge pertaining to acts of worship relating to the body and property. The third is knowledge pertaining to the five faculties of the tongue, the loins, the stomach, hearing, and sight. The fourth is knowledge of the blameworthy character traits that must be removed from the heart. The fifth is knowledge of the praiseworthy character traits that God requires of the heart.





CHAPTER 24

THE MEANING OF REPENTANCE AND CONTRITION

The true meaning of repentance (*tawba*) is to return from defiance [of God] to obedience, and from the far path to the near path. It is composed of knowledge, state, and action, as are all spiritual stations. Knowledge is the basis, for it is a branch of faith in God or faith in His Revelation.ⁱ Knowledge gives rise to state, which means the emotions that are felt in the heart as a result of it; and these emotions give rise to action.

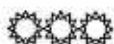
Repentance must be preceded by two things. The first is recognition that one is guilty of sin. The second is awareness that repentance is not something within one's own power, but something that God creates and causes. This is part of faith in God, for it concerns the Divine Decree; the other is part of faith in God's Revelation, for it concerns His Law.

The four pillars of repentance are knowledge, regret, resolve, and abstinence. The amount of regret required is whatever is necessary to prompt one to renounce the sin.

i This is *imān bi-Llāh* and *imān li-Llāh*, literally "faith in God and faith for God", meaning belief in God as dictated by reason, and belief in what God communicates to mankind concerning Himself.

The fruits of repentance include fleeing, contrition, and self-abasement. Fleeing (*firār*) means to escape from sin to obedience, which basic faith requires of everyone. Then there is fleeing to God from distractions, or fleeing from what is good to what is better. This is another level of repentance by means of which perfect felicity in the Hereafter is attained. It is not required for basic faith, but for perfect faith. In this sense there is no end to the levels of repentance; and this is the true meaning of contrition (*ināba*), which is to turn again and again to God whether one has sinned or not. Self-abasement (*ikhbāt*) means to yield deferentially and willingly to the truth.

Know also that it is valid to repent either from all sins or from particular sins individually.¹ God Most High knows best.



i The wording in the treatise is ambiguous here; the translation is based on what al-Ghazālī has to say on the matter in the *Iḥyā'* in the Book of Repentance.



CHAPTER 25

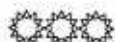
PATIENCE, SELF-DISCIPLINE, AND REFINEMENT

Again, this comprises knowledge, state, and action. The knowledge is to believe all that God Most High has told us about how the soul, the Devil, and the passions are enemies to the intellect, knowledge, and the inspiring angel; that they are engaged in constant warfare; and that those who aid the party of God against Satan will enter His Paradise. This [knowledge] is obligatory, for it is part of faith in God. The state that arises from this faith is that the religious impulse becomes firmly established in its opposition to the impulse of base desire. What is necessary in this regard is to strengthen the religious impulse with threats and promises so that the party of God defeat the army of Satan: *Truly it is the party of God who are victorious* (Qur'ān 5:56).

Self-discipline means to train the soul in virtue, guiding it along gradually until things that formerly seemed daunting to it seem trifling. Self-refinement means to put the soul to the test and make it prove itself whenever it lays claim to a spiritual station.

The sign that a person has found a balanced position in the station of patience is that he finds it easy to engage in good works

without any obstacle or objection. And it is God Most High who grants all success.





CHAPTER 26

FEAR

To fear may be added grief, contraction, apprehensiveness, and reverence, since they are different types of fear; and also scrupulousness, since that is one of its fruits.

The knowledge that gives rise to fear is the awareness of the divine Attributes and their influence, and how one might be brought near or banished far, saved or damned, without any warning or ability to do anything about it. This kind of fear is intrinsically desirable and it is necessary to believe in it, for it is part of faith in God. Fear prevents one from becoming deluded by one's good deeds into imagining that one is safe from God's devising; for *none feel secure from God's devising but those who are lost* (Qur'ān 7:99).

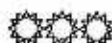
There is also a kind of fear that is extrinsically desirable, which is of two kinds. The first is fear that one's blessings will be taken away, which is desirable in that it encourages one to be reverent towards God and recognize His favors. The second is fear of legal punishments, which is desirable in that it encourages one to abstain from crime and fulfill one's duties.

The state of fear is the feeling of pain and agitation in the heart when it anticipates something unpleasant or grieves for something

lost. Fear may be obligatory, encouraged, forbidden, or discouraged, depending on the context.

Contraction is a feeling that overcomes the heart. If its cause is known, it is judged in the same way that grief is. If its cause is unknown, it is a punishment that afflicts the disciple to temper his excessive expansiveness.

Apprehensiveness means a balanced combination of fear and hope in the heart. Reverence is when the heart and limbs fall still because the heart is witnessing something awesome or terrifying. Scrupulousness means avoiding anything that is potentially harmful. God knows best.





CHAPTER 27

HOPE

To this may be added fervor, since it is a kind of hope, and also expansiveness, since it is one of the fruits of hope.

The knowledge that gives rise to hope is, once again, awareness of the eternal divine Attributes which give rise to everything pleasing and displeasing, every benefit and harm. Anyone who knows this of God will fear Him and hope for Him. This kind of hope is intrinsically desirable, for it is to recognize that good and evil are not in our control but in God's. It is a grace that God gives to whomever is destined for felicity. This hope prevents one from being driven by fear into despair.

There is also a kind of hope that is extrinsically desirable, namely the hope that encourages a person to perform many good works. If it does not encourage this, it is not hope but mere wishful thinking. True hope is when the heart expands in anticipation of its Beloved, having done all it can to hasten His arrival.

Fervor is when this state overwhelms the hopeful person's heart to such an extent that he can almost see the thing he hopes for. It is the perfection and the true culmination of hope.

Expansiveness is when the heart swells up and the door to guidance is blown open for it by the wind of hope.



CHAPTER 28

POVERTY

Poverty leads to devotion, annihilation, and detachment. Poverty means neediness and privation, but neediness is of two kinds: absolute, and qualified. Absolute neediness is the individual's need for a Maker to bring him into existence, then to sustain him, and then to guide him to his Maker. This is poverty before God, for He is the Maker, Sustainer, and Guide. This poverty is obligatory, because it is part of faith in God and His Revelation. The state that arises from this knowledge is for the individual to bear witness to his own perpetual poverty and neediness of God.

Qualified neediness is the individual's need for the means of his sustenance, to obtain which he requires money; thus money is the object of qualified neediness.

Absolute poverty [in the spiritual sense] is intrinsically desirable, for its object is God. Qualified poverty is extrinsically desirable, insofar as it gives rise to devotion and dedication to God alone. This is the path to enrichment in God, which means for the heart to be attached solely to God, Exalted is He, and therefore detached from all but Him. The only detachment that is strictly required is the belief that the eternal is detached from the ephemeral. God knows best.



CHAPTER 29

ASCETICISM

To this may be added selflessness and chivalry, since they are its corresponding traits, and also the station of the willed [to be explained below], which is one of its fruits.

The knowledge that gives rise to asceticism (*zuhd*) towards the world is faith in God's Revelation: that is, in His Words, *Yet you [humankind] prefer the present life, though the Hereafter is better and more lasting* (Qur'ān 87:16-17). The state that results from this knowledge is the redirection of the will away from the world and towards the glories that God has in store.

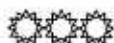
Yet there is also asceticism towards everything besides God, even the delights of Paradise. This results from comparing the lowliness of existence to the majesty and perfection of God. This is the kind of asceticism that is intrinsically desirable, and which is rooted in faith in God, for it is connected to the divine Majesty and Perfection. Asceticism towards the world is extrinsically desirable, inasmuch as it empties the heart and prepares it to receive this deeper knowledge. This lesser kind of asceticism is required to the extent that it encourages one to free up time to fulfill one's religious obligations. The objects of asceticism can only be lawful

things; and it cannot be called ascetic to "abstain" from something that one does not have [lawful] access to in the first place.

The fruit of asceticism is selflessness (*ithār*), which is the highest level of generosity. Ordinary generosity means to give freely something that one has no need of, while selflessness means to give freely something that one needs, without hope for compensation or any motive other than to adorn oneself with the character traits of God.

Chivalry (*futuwwa*) boils down to the traits of manliness; a chivalrous man is one who fulfills the obligations of the Law and of manliness. The one who joins worldly people in their pursuits is neither chivalrous nor manly.

The station of the willed (*maqām al-murād*)ⁱ means to stand firmly by the truth without contesting it or objecting to it, and not to be distracted from God Most High by anything. God knows best.



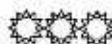
i In contradistinction with that of *al-murid*, the disciple, "he who wills and seeks."



CHAPTER 30

SELF-EXAMINATION

Self-examination (*muḥāsaba*) means to scrutinize one's past, and also one's future. All Muslims recognize that it is obligatory. The knowledge that gives rise to self-examination is the belief that God will hold one to account. The fruits of self-examination are holding fast (*i'tiṣām*) and uprightness (*istiḳāma*). The difference between them is that holding fast means adhering to the Book of God and keeping within His bounds, while uprightness means being firm and balanced rather than straying to either side away from the path. Uprightness is both intrinsically and extrinsically desirable. It is intrinsically desirable insofar as it is a means of ascending from the valley of separation to the station of unification. God knows best.





CHAPTER 31

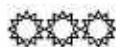
GRATITUDE

The knowledge that gives rise to gratitude (*shukr*) is to know that all favors are from God alone. This is obligatory because it is part of faith in God, Who says, *Whatever bounty you may have, it is from God* (Qur'ān 16:53). Gratitude towards the Giver of favor is part of faith.

The state that arises from this knowledge is joy and delight in God's favors. This joy is itself a kind of gratitude, and is obligatory because it too is part of faith in God.

Any action that arises from gratitude is both intrinsically and extrinsically desirable. It is intrinsically desirable insofar as it means to utilize God's favors for their proper purpose, which is part of wisdom. It is extrinsically desirable insofar as it means to preserve one's existing favors and invite more in the future.

In sum, gratitude means using God's favors for the purpose for which they were created. He who finds balance in all his affairs by putting things in their proper place is a wise man, for that is what wisdom means, whether through knowledge or action. All enabling grace is from God.





CHAPTER 32

RELIANCE [UPON GOD]

To this may be added resignation, deference, trust, and contentment, those being its [related] principles.

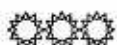
The knowledge that gives rise to reliance (*tawakkul*) is to know that God is Self-Sustaining and sustains all things, and then to recognize His infinite Knowledge, Wisdom, and Power.

The state that arises from this knowledge is for the heart to depend upon God Most High with tranquility and a total lack of agitation because it is attached to God. The bare minimum of reliance that is required of every person is whatever is enough to restrain him from pursuing unlawful means.

Despite its nobility, reliance is below the level of resignation (*tafwid*) and submission (*taslim*), for a reliant person is still concerned with obtaining benefit and avoiding harm. The true meaning of resignation and submission is to surrender oneself entirely to the will of God, and to abdicate one's free will in favor of whatever God decrees.

Trust (*thiqa*) means to shore up the heart so that the beliefs it harbors become unshakeable. This is a state that complements all other spiritual states and stations.

Contentment (*riḍā*) applies to the past, while resignation and deference apply to the future. The bare minimum of contentment required of a person is that he be content in his mind, even if he feels some natural aversion to his fate. It is not in anyone's power to force himself to like something which he dislikes. But if he goes beyond this and expresses his dislike for the trials to which God subjects His servants in this life and the Next, whether in deliberate thought or in word, he is guilty of sin and has departed from the contentment that is required of him. All success is from God.





CHAPTER 33

INTENTION

Intention (*niyya*) is the means, after faith, to the attainment of ultimate felicity in this life and the Next. Once you know this, you must then understand its true meaning and protect it from being sullied by worldly desires, this being essential, and also from other-worldly ambitions, this being recommended. Intention means differentiating between given motivations. Purpose (*qaṣd*) means to direct one's aspiration towards the selected goal. Resolve (*ʿazm*) means to strengthen and revive one's purpose. Will (*irāda*) means to dispel all contrary notions from the mind.





CHAPTER 34

TRUTHFULNESS

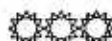
To this may be added disconnection, connection, realization, and isolation, those being the signs of truthfulness.

With reference to God, Truthfulness is an essential Attribute which applies to the meaning of His Speech. For the human being, truthfulness means that the inner being matches the outer, and the private matches the public. All the spiritual stations and states are realized in truthfulness. Even sincerity (*ikhhlās*) before God Himself requires it, and yet truthfulness does not require anything. For the true meaning of sincerity in worship is to direct one's obedience to God. For example, one may pray in obedience to God yet still lack presence of heart in his prayer. Truthfulness, conversely, is to direct one's worship to God while being present with Him during it. So every truthful worshipper is sincere, but not every sincere worshipper is truthful.

This is the meaning of disconnection (*infiṣāl*) and connection (*ittiṣāl*); the truthful worshipper disconnects from all besides God and connects to God with presence of heart.

Realization (*taḥqiq*) means to differentiate spiritual stations and states from one another, and to purify them of intrusions and contaminants.

Isolation (*tafrid*) means to stand in the Presence of God, Exalted is He, divested of all knowledge and state, in order to witness His Oneness, that He alone existentiates all things, and that His power envelops all.





CHAPTER 35

CONTENTMENT (WITH GOD)ⁱ

Al-Ḥārith [al-Muḥāsibī]ⁱⁱ said, "Contentment (*riḍā*) means the heart's tranquil acquiescence in the Divine Decree."

Dhūl-Nūn [al-Miṣrī] said, "Contentment is the heart's happy acceptance of its fate."

The Messenger of God ﷺ said, "One who is content with God as Lord has tasted the flavor of faith." He ﷺ also said, "In His wisdom, God has placed repose in contentment and certainty, and anxiety and sorrow in doubt and resentment."

Junayd [al-Baghdādī] said, "Contentment means sound knowledge that reaches the heart. When the true nature of knowledge reaches the heart, it leads it to contentment. Contentment and love are not like fear and hope, for they endure in this life and the Next; [even] in Paradise one cannot do without contentment and love."

Ibn 'Aṭā' [al-Adamī] said, "Contentment means the heart's tranquil acquiescence to what God predestined for it, and its conviction that He chose what is best for it. It is to be free of resentment."

i This chapter appears almost verbatim in Chapter 61 of al-Suhrawardī's *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*.

ii An Iraqi ascetic and one of the most influential writers on Sufi methodology and theology (d. 243/857).

Abū Turāb [al-Nakhshabī]ⁱ said, "One cannot receive contentment from God as long as the world holds any value in one's heart."

Sarī [al-Saqaṭī] said, "Those brought close to God have five attributes: contentment with God Most High regardless of their individual likes and dislikes, the cultivation of their love for Him, shame before Him, familiarity with Him, and alienation from all besides Him."

Al-Fuḍayl [ibn 'Iyāḍ]ⁱⁱ said, "Contentment means not to aspire to anything above one's present position."

Ibn Sam'unⁱⁱⁱ said, "There is contentment with God, contentment for God, and contentment from God: contentment with Him as the Master of one's fate; contentment from Him as one's Provider; and contentment for Him as Lord."

Abū Sa'id^{iv} was asked, "Can a person be contented and discontented at the same time?" He replied, "Yes: he can be content with his Lord, but discontent with himself and with any obstacle that separates him from God Most High."

Someone told Ḥasan ibn 'Alī that Abū Dharr had said, "Poverty is dearer to me than wealth, and sickness is dearer to me than wealth." He replied, "May God have mercy on Abū Dharr—but for my part, I would say that whoever relies on God's sound judgment will not wish to be in any state but the one in which God puts him."

Alī  said, "[He who sits upon the carpet of contentment will never receive anything from God that he dislikes]. He who sits

i Abū Turāb (d. 245/859) was a wandering Sufi from Khorasan.

ii Al-Fuḍayl (d. 187/803) renounced his career as a highway robber and became a Sufi sage and ascetic.

iii A sage and narrator of Baghdad (d. 387/997).

iv Not otherwise identified, but possibly the famous Persian Sufi master Abū Sa'id ibn Abī al-Khayr (d. 440/1049).

upon [the carpet of] petition will never be content with God in any circumstances."ⁱ

[Abū Bakr] al-Shibliⁱⁱ said in the presence of Junayd, "There is no strength or power but through God!" Junayd remarked, "What you have said is for when one is ill at ease." He replied, "That is true." Junayd said, "To feel ill at ease is to lack contentment with destiny."

Junayd, may God have mercy on him, was speaking here about the root of contentment; for contentment is the result of the heart's expansion and ease, which itself results from the light of certainty. When that light shines within a person, his heart expands and the eye of insight opens to behold the beauty of God's plan. When this happens there can be no question of resentment or discontent, for when the heart expands it is filled with love; and the lover is always content with what his beloved does, and wants what his beloved wants. It is said that "Everything the beloved does is beloved." The Sufis dislike to serve others and refuse to mix with them, for those who do not love their Path are more likely to be harmed by looking at them than to benefit from them.

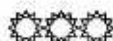
According to a Tradition,ⁱⁱⁱ "The believer is the believer's mirror." If at any time a sign of dispersion should appear in one of them, [the others] will chide him; for dispersion manifests as a display of the self, which is one of the ways in which the proper duties of the present moment are neglected. When the disciple's self becomes manifest, they realize that he has strayed outside the circle of [spiritual] composure, and they judge that he has neglected the dictates of the moment, the proper way of things, and self-control.

i What is between square brackets is from the quotation as given in *'Awārif al-ma'ārif*, and was likely omitted by the copyist or editor here.

ii A Sufi master of Persian extraction, Shibli (d. 334/946) was one of the students and successors of Junayd.

iii Bukhārī, *al-Adab al-Mufrad* 239.

Accordingly, he is confronted verbally in order to bring him back to the circle of composure.





CHAPTER 36

THE SIN OF BACKBITING

Godⁱ says, Almighty and Glorious is He, *Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would detest it* (Qur'ān 49:12). Abū Hurayra ؓ related that once the Prophet ﷺ stood up but a man who was with him did not stand up. Someone in the group said, "How hopeless So-and-So is!" The Prophet ﷺ retorted, "You have eaten your brother's flesh, and backbitten him!"

It is said that God revealed to Moses ؑ, "One who dies having repented of backbiting will be the last man to enter Paradise; one who dies unrepentant of it will be the first to enter Hell."

It is said that Ibrāhīm ibn Ad-hamⁱⁱ was invited to a gathering. When he attended, he found that the people there were backbiting another man who had not attended. Ibrāhīm said, "This is no one's fault but my own: I have attended a gathering where people are backbitten!" He left the gathering and did not eat for three days.

i This chapter appears to be an abridgement of the chapter on backbiting in the *Risāla* (Treatise) of Abūl-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, one of the classic manuals of Sufism.

ii An early Sufi ascetic and sage from Balkh in today's Afghanistan (d. ca. 165/782).

It is said that a person who backbites others is like a man who builds a catapult and flings away his own good deeds in all directions.

It is also said that on the Day of Resurrection, a person will be presented with his book of deeds only to find that there are no good works recorded in it at all. He will say, "But where are my prayers, my fasts, my [acts of] obedience?" The reply will come: "All your deeds were squandered when you backbit others." Conversely, another man will see in his ledger some good deeds that he never did. When he enquires about this, he will be told, "That is recompense for the times when people backbit you without your knowing it."

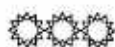
It is also said that God will forgive half the sins of the victim of backbiting.

Hasan al-Baṣrī was informed that a certain person had backbitten him, so he sent him a plate of sweets and the message, "It has come to my attention that you have donated your good works to me, so here is payment for them."

Junayd said, "Once I was in Baghdad waiting to attend a funeral prayer when I saw a poor man who looked as though he might be a devotee, begging from people. I thought to myself, 'It would be better if he worked to support himself.' Later I went home and read my regular litanies,ⁱ then went to sleep. I dreamed they brought that poor man to me spread upon a table, and said to me, 'Eat his flesh, for you backbit him!' I understood what they meant, and protested, 'But I did not backbite him! I only thought it to myself.' They retorted, 'Such a thing is not acceptable from the likes of you. Go and ask his pardon.' In the morning I did not stop looking until at last I found him picking up stray vegetable leaves from water in which they had been washed. I greeted him

i An important part of the story omitted here but present in the *Risāla* is that Junayd found it difficult to perform his litanies, and could not get to sleep at first.

and he said, 'Abūl-Qāsim, will you ever do it again?' I replied, 'No.'
He said, 'Then may God forgive us both.'"





CHAPTER 37

CHIVALRY

The chivalrous man abdicates control over himself, his property, and his family, entrusting all these to the Owner of all things. Indeed, he does not see it as being his to give in the first place, for he has relinquished them by the right of *Truly God has purchased from the believers their lives and their possessions in exchange for the Garden* (Qur'ān 9:111). He has taken to heart God's Words *Truly God enjoins justice, virtue, and kindness to kinsfolk, and He forbids indecency, wickedness, and oppression* (Qur'ān 16:90). He does not miss the opportunity to obey God with justice and virtue whenever it arises, nor does he fail to abstain from indecency and wickedness.

Chivalry (*futuwwa*) has different levels. For the masses it pertains to property. For the elite it pertains to property and action. For the innermost elite it pertains to property, action, and state. For the Prophets it pertains to all these and to the innermost secret heart as well.

The chivalrous man harbors no claims within him, nor does he display any pretensions outwardly. The secret between himself and God is hidden even from his heart, to say nothing of other people.

The chivalrous man judges others kindly and himself harshly. He acknowledges the rights of all, whether they be his superiors, his inferiors, or his equals. He does not subject his brethren to error, disrespect, or untruth. He sees all people as saints and does not find fault with anything they do unless it contravenes the Law, in which case he blames it on the Devil, not on his fellow Muslim, and certainly not on Almighty God. He endeavors to change evil with his hand, his words, or at the very least his heart.

The chivalrous man does not put his hopes in his fellow creatures or ask anything of them. He hides his poverty and does not display his need, but acts as if he needs nothing. He does not make claims, but keeps his secrets and bears abuse patiently. He prefers the desires of others to his own, both in character and in action. He is always at the service of others. He gives without drawing attention to himself. He does not seek his rights from others but always gives them their due. He acknowledges the merit of others and criticizes his own shortcomings. He does not disdain anything that comes his way.

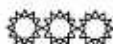
The chivalrous man renounces all his selfish interests. It makes no difference to him whether ordinary people praise him or criticize him. He is truthful, loyal, generous, modest, well-mannered, kind, and affectionate. He avoids hearing anything ugly, even from his friends. He keeps his promises. He harbors no rancor, envy, or duplicity. He loves and hates for God's sake. He is happy to lend his possessions and influence to his brethren if he can, and does not demand any thanks for it when he does. He keeps the company of the righteous and avoids the iniquitous. He contends against his own self for his Lord's sake, and has no other adversary. He struggles to overcome its vain desires, for it is said that the chivalrous man is the one who breaks idols: that is, the all-too-human idol [of his self].

The chivalrous man does not disdain to keep the company of the poor, nor does he seek the company of the rich so as to profit from them. He turns away from the ephemeral things of the world. It makes no difference to him whether a person be a resident or a visitor, known to him or unknown. He is as happy to share a meal with a saint as with an unbeliever. He does not hoard wealth or proffer false excuses. He acknowledges his blessings, and keeps his love secret. He does not try to outdo his fellows, or resent them if they outdo him. He does not cause anyone inconvenience unless he is bound by the Law to do so. He does not seek to profit at the expense of a friend. He does not go back on his word. If he receives, he is grateful; if he is denied, he is patient. Indeed, if he receives, he gives selflessly; if he is denied, he is grateful.

Chivalry means not to be distracted from God by creation. The gnostic's chivalry is concerned with the Object of his gnosis. For others, it is a matter of custom and routine.

Generosity

Generosity (*sakhā'*) means putting the interests of one's brethren ahead of one's own in a general sense, in worldly and religious matters. It is to give before one is asked, and not to make a show of giving. It is to give quickly, nonchalantly, and secretly. Indeed, it is to sacrifice one's possessions and life for others with the utmost modesty, and to hate to see one's fellow Muslim degraded by the need to ask of others. Generosity of soul regarding the possessions of others [by not coveting them] is something even greater than giving away one's own. There is more gallantry in contentment than in giving. Greatest of all is to be generous with wisdom.





CHAPTER 38

NOBLE CHARACTERⁱ

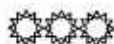
God says, *Be forgiving, enjoin what is right, and turn away from the ignorant* (Qur'ān 7:199). This means forgiving those who wrong you, giving to those who refuse you, maintaining ties with those who cut you off, turning away from those who are ignorant towards you, and treating well those who mistreat you. [The Prophet] ﷺ, who was sent with noble character, said, "Dear God, forgive my people, for truly they know not!"

It is part of generosity of character "to spread greetings of peace, give food to people, maintain family ties, and pray at night when others sleep."ⁱⁱ Noble traits (*makārim*) are attained by avoiding unlawful things (*maḥārim*). Noble traits are the deeds of the inhabitants of Paradise: gentle words and gracious action, and repaying kindness with greater kindness. The man of noble character is the one who does not wait until you are forced to ask of him. He is always apologetic, unlike the wretch who is always boasting. He

i This chapter seems to be largely taken from the chapter of the same name in *al-Muqaddima fī al-taṣawwuf* by Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021).

ii A reference to a well-known hadith which indicates the means for believers to enter Paradise in peace.

ignores the faults of his brethren and is quick to come to their aid.
He leaves this world to those who need it.





CHAPTER 39

CONTENTMENTⁱ

God says, *Whoever does right, whether male or female, and is a believer, We shall surely grant them a goodly life* (Qur'ān 16:97). Many commentators say that the goodly life is this world is contentment (*qanā'a*). Contentment is a gift from God, Almighty and Glorious is He; the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "Contentment is an inexhaustible treasure."

He ﷺ also said, "Whoever desires a companion, God is enough for him. Whoever desires comfort, the Qur'an is enough for him. Whoever desires a treasure, contentment is enough for him. Whoever desires an advisor, death is enough for him. If these four are not enough for someone, Hell will be enough for him."

Abū Hurayra رضي الله عنه related that God's Messenger ﷺ said, "Be scrupulous, and you will be the most pious of people. Be content, and you will be the most grateful of people. Love for others what you love for yourself, and you will be a believer. Be a good neighbor to your neighbors, and you will be a Muslim. Laugh little, for too much laughter kills the heart."

ⁱ This appears to be an abridgement of the chapter on the same topic in Qushayri's *Risāla*.

It is said that the Words of [God] Most High, *God will surely provide for them a goodly provision* (Qur'ān 22:58), allude to contentment.

Wahb [ibn Munabbih]ⁱ said, "Might and wealth went out to roam about. They came across contentment, and there they settled down."

In the *Zabūr*ⁱⁱ it is said that "A contented man is rich, even if he is hungry." In the Torah it is said, "When the son of Adam is contented, he is free of need. When he keeps apart from people, he is safe. When he renounces envy, his manliness shines forth. He toils little, and he rests at length."

It is said that God has placed five things in five places: might in obedience, humiliation in sin, awe in the night vigil, wisdom in an empty stomach, and wealth in contentment.

Someone said, "Avenge yourself upon your greed with contentment, just as you would avenge yourself upon your enemy." It is also said that anyone whose eyes are always fixed upon the possessions of others will always be grieving.

Itⁱⁱⁱ is said that Abū Yazīd [al-Bastāmī] was once washing his clothes in the countryside with a companion, who suggested that they hang their clothes to dry on the wall of a nearby vineyard. Abū Yazīd replied, "We cannot drive a nail into someone else's wall." His companion suggested they hang them on a tree instead, but he replied, "No, it might break the branch." He suggested they spread them out on the grass, but Abū Yazīd said, "No, that is for the livestock to eat." He then laid the wet garment over his back to dry in the sun, turning it over so that it dried on both sides.

i A much-quoted hadith scholar, sage and ascetic from Yemen (d. ca. 110/728).

ii The original Scripture revealed to the Prophet David عليه السلام.

iii This tale is quoted in the chapter on God-consciousness in *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, and seems more relevant there, or in one of the several passages in the present work concerning scrupulousness and God-consciousness, than here.



CHAPTER 40

BEGGING

If one begs when he has enough to eat for the rest of the day, he is robbing those who are truly weak and needy. If one desires the Hereafter, God will place his wealth in his heart and make him whole, and the world will come to him willingly. If one desires [the goods of] this world, God will brand him with poverty between the eyes and make him fragmented, and he will [still] get nothing from this world that was not already destined for him. If a person concentrates all concerns into a single concern, God will give him all he needs in this life and the Next. If someone is given to having disparate concerns, God Most High will not care which one of those valleys he perishes in.

Even if you could gain all the riches of the world from first to last, it would not be enough to relieve a single hour of sorrow. What, then, could you hope to gain from the little you might obtain during your short life?

Whoever is content with what God apportions to him, God will put blessing in it and increase it. Whoever refrains from begging, God will give him more than he could ask for. When you display your neediness to someone, to fall in their esteem. If you wish to be free, do not depend on anybody else, but be satisfied with

what you have. It is not fitting for a free man to humiliate himself before slaves, when he can find everything he needs with his Lord.

If people knew what [harm] there is in begging, no one would ever engage in it. Yet if they knew the duty they owe the beggar, they would never refuse anyone who begged from them. If a beggar is telling the truth, it is a grave sin to refuse him. Yet when a man begs for anything from another man, whether he gives it not, he is marked by loss of dignity for forty days.

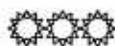




CHAPTER 41

COMPASSION FOR GOD'S CREATURES

To show compassion to God's creatures is to show reverence for God, Exalted is He. This means giving them what they ask of you, and refraining from overburdening them. It means avoiding speaking to them about things they do not know about, or even things they do. It means being pleased by what pleases them, and saddened by what saddens them. It means thinking of how to benefit them and protect them from harm in their worldly and religious affairs. It is to be so concerned for them that if a fly were to alight on one of their faces, it would pain your heart to see it. It is that you would rather protect the heart of your fellow believer than engage in many pious works for your own sake. It is to put your brother's dignity ahead of your own, and to prefer to see yourself humiliated rather than him.





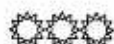
CHAPTER 42

THE DIRE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN

Happy is he whose sins die when he dies! It is said that the worst sin is to wrong someone you do not know and have never seen. Whoever obeys God, Exalted is He, He subjects all things to him; whoever disobeys Him, He subjects him to all things, giving them power over him. Even if the only consequence of persisting in sin were that everything one experiences in life is a punishment for it, whether poverty or riches, sickness or health, that would be dire enough. Even if the only consequence of giving up sin were to avoid that fate, it would be reason enough to repent. One may be deprived of provision because of a sin he commits.

To be cursed is not to have a disfigured face or a lack of wealth; to be cursed is to go blundering from one sin to the next. You are not any less capable of repenting than you are of sinning. If you find that things have changed for the worse in your life and your relations with your fellow men and your family, it is your sins that have caused it—even the temperament of your horse or the mice that scurry around your house. Sin may cause you to forget the Qur'ān or the things you have learned. Punishment for sin may take the form of anything unpleasant or distressing, or even minor inconveniences. The punishment for committing one sin may be

that you commit another, just as the inverse is true of good deeds.
There is no power or strength but through God.





CHAPTER 43

THE RITUAL PRAYER OF THOSE NEAR TO GODⁱ

When you begin to pray, forget the world and its people, and turn to God even as you will turn to Him on the Day of Resurrection. Remember that you are standing before God without any interpreter between you, and He is facing you to engage in intimate discourse with you. Remember Whom you are standing before: the Magnificent King.

Someone was once asked how to say the initiatory *takbīr* of the prayer. He replied, "When you say *Allāh akbar*, you must utter the Name of God with reverence during the letter *Alif*, with awe during the letter *Lām*, and with vigilance and fear during the letter *Hā*."

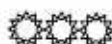
There are those who say *Allāh akbar* and disappear into beholding the grandeur of God, so that the entire universe is as tiny as a mustard seed within the vastness of their expanding hearts. Such a person could never be troubled by misgivings and jumbled thoughts; for such things come from the world; and the world is

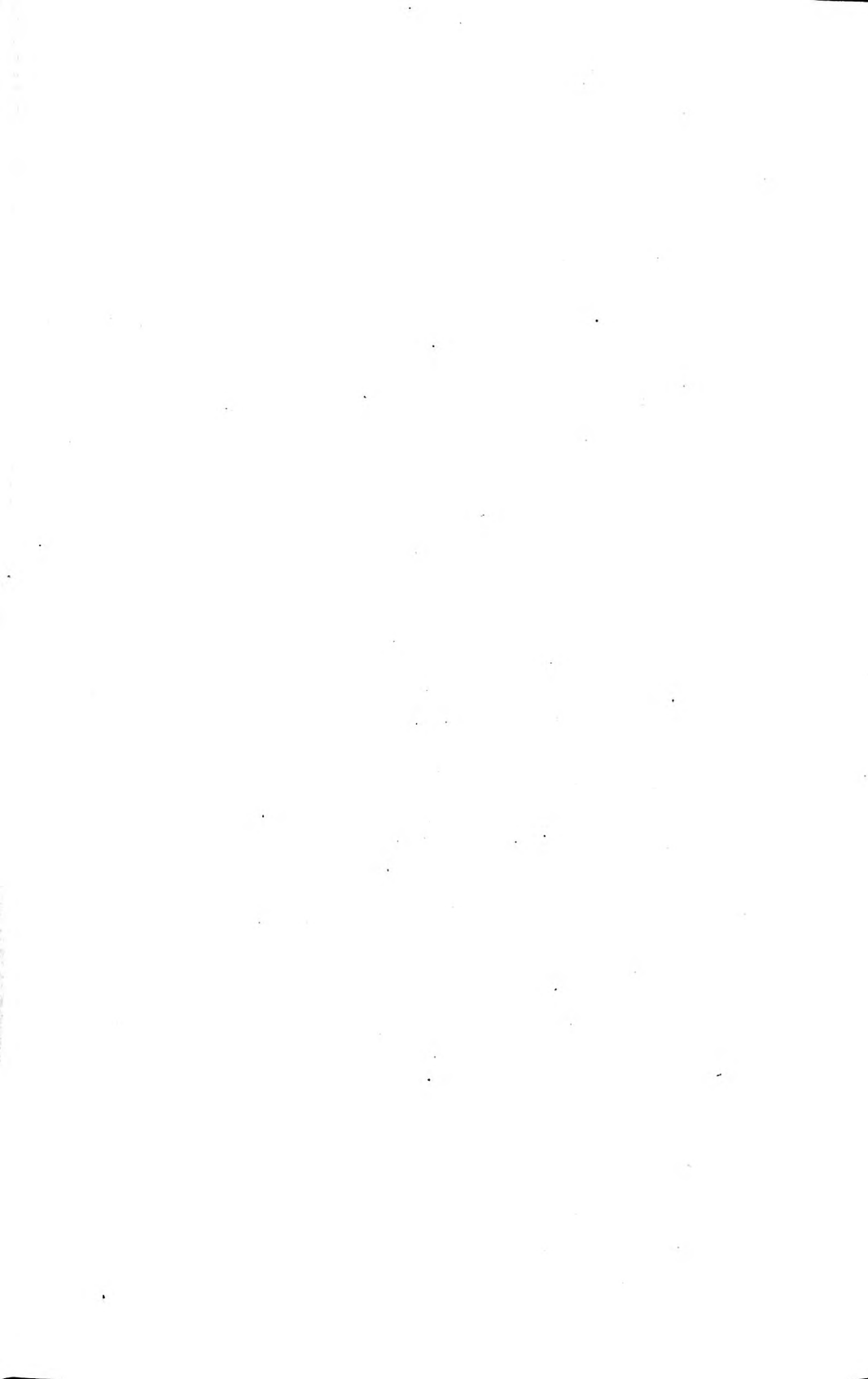
i This chapter appears to be an abridgement of the chapter of the same name in *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*.

but a mustard seed cast down upon the great plain of his heart.
God knows best.



May God make us and [all of] you among His closest servants, righteous knowers, and pure chosen ones. May He bless our Master Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets and Leader of the Superlatively Honorable, and his Family and close Companions, his pure and goodly wives, and his sincerely devoted progeny, and all the Prophets, Messengers, and Angels of proximity, and give them peace. Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds.







THE NICHE OF LIGHTS

Mishkāt al-anwār



*In the Name of God,
the All-Merciful, the Most Merciful*

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

*God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The likeness of His
Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass,
the glass is as a glittering star, kindled from a blessed
tree, an olive neither of the east nor of the west. Its
oil would well-nigh shine forth, though no fire
touched it. Light upon light! God guides to
His Light whom He will; and God sets
forth similitudes for mankind;
and God knows all things.*

(QUR'AN 24:35)

Praise be to God, the Emanator of Lights, the Opener of Eyes,
the Revealer of Secrets, the Remover of Veils. May blessings and
peace be upon Muḥammad, the Light of Lights, the Master of
Mankind, the Beloved of the All-Compelling, the Herald of the
All-Forgiving, the Warner of the All-Conquering, the Subduer of

the Unbelievers, the Humiliator of the Profligate; and upon his pure righteous Family and Companions.

Dear brother, may God guide you upon the path to ultimate happiness, choose you for the ascent to the sublime heights, strengthen your insight with the light of truth, and cleanse all but the Real from your heart. You asked me to send you an explanation of the secrets of the divine lights in the context of the Holy Qur'ān and the transmitted tradition, such as God's Words, *God is the Light of the heavens and the earth*, and the meaning of this symbol alongside those of the Niche, the Glass, the Lamp, the Oil, and the Tree, and also the words of the Prophet ﷺ, "God has seventy thousand veils of light and darkness; if He lifted them, the rays of His Face would burn up all who looked upon it."ⁱ

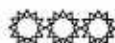
Now, your question expresses a desire to make a very steep and difficult ascent which few would even think of attempting. You have knocked upon a door that is closed tight and opens only to those who are firmly rooted in knowledge. Not every secret can be revealed, nor can every reality be brought into the open; for "the hearts of the saints are the graves of secrets," and one of the knowers of God said, "To reveal the secret of Lordship is unbelief." Indeed, the Master of the First and Last himself said, "Some knowledge is like a hidden treasure, known only to those who know God. If they speak of it, only those who are deluded regarding God deny it."ⁱⁱ And as long as there are many who are deluded regarding God, such secrets must be kept from falling

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- i This hadith is found in Tabarānī, *Kabīr* 5664, with the wording, "God Almighty is behind seventy thousand veils of light and darkness. Any soul that sensed the tiniest sound from those veils would die on the spot." It is also narrated by Muslim (*Ṣaḥīḥ*, 293) with the wording, "His veil is light; if He lifted it, the rays of His Face would burn up any of His creation who looked upon it."
- ii Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *al-Arba'in fī al-taṣawwuf*; cited by the hadith master Zayn al-Dīn al-'Irāqī in *Takhrij Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, which gives the sources of hadiths in the *Iḥyā'*.

into the hands of the wicked. Yet since I see that your heart is expanded with light, and your innermost secret is cleansed from the darkness of delusion, I will not deny you an allusion indicative of these subtle glimmers of truth, but will point you in their direction. To withhold knowledge from those who are worthy of it is just as bad as giving it to those who are not. As the poet said:

To bestow knowledge on the stupid is to waste it;
To withhold it from the deserving is to wrong them.

I ask you, therefore, to be content with a few brief allusions and hints, for if the truth about this matter is to be reached, the foundations must first be laid down. I do not have the time to explain the matter at length, nor in truth do I have the mind or the inclination for it. The keys to hearts are in God's Hand, and He opens them as He pleases for whom He pleases. For now, all that will open are three parts.





CHAPTER I

GOD IS THE TRUE LIGHT, AND ALL OTHER LIGHT IS MERELY FIGURATIVE

To explain this, one must consider the meaning of light according to the first sense used by the masses, then the second sense used by the elite, then the third sense used by the elite of the elite. After that, one must consider the true meaning of the levels of lights as described by the elite, in order to recognize that God is the Highest Most Sublime Light, and that He alone is the true Light and has no partner in this.

The common meaning of light refers to manifestation, which is a relative matter because a thing can be manifest to one person and hidden from another, making it manifest and hidden at the same time, relatively speaking in each case. Its relative manifestation must pertain to perception, and the strongest and most important means of perception recognized by the common man are the senses, one of which is the sense of sight. Relative to this sense, things are of three kinds: that which itself is not visible, such as dark objects; that which is itself visible but does not make other things visible, such as bright things like the stars or a fire before it is blazing; and that which makes other things visible, such as the sun, the moon, a blazing fire, or a lamp. Light is the name of this

third category. Sometimes the word "light" is used to mean the thing that emanates from these luminous objects and falls upon the exterior of opaque bodies. Thus one says that the earth is lit up when the light of the sun falls upon it, or that a lamp lights up a wall or a garment. Other times the term refers to the shining objects themselves, since they are themselves luminous. In sum, light is a term for that which is itself visible and makes other things visible, like the sun. That is the definition of the term in its first sense.

Now, since the secret and spirit of light is manifestation for perception, and this perception depends on the existence of light along with the beholding eye—for although light both manifests and causes other than itself to manifest, neither of these are true for the blind—this means that the beholding spirit is just as important as manifest light, inasmuch as it is an essential element of perception. Indeed, it is even more important, inasmuch as the beholding spirit is the element that perceives and through which the perception occurs. The light itself does not perceive, nor does perception occur through it, but merely in its presence. This almost makes the name "light" more suited to the eye than to the light itself, which is why people speak of the "light of the eye," or say of a bat or a poor-sighted man that "the light of his eyes is weak," or that a blind man has "lost the light of his eyes." Similarly, it is said that the pupil concentrates and strengthens "the light of the eye," and that the divine wisdom decreed that the eye be surrounded by black lashes in order "to concentrate its light," while the white of the eye "disperses and weakens the eye's light." That is why if one gazes too long at a white surface or at the sun, the "light of the eye" is dazzled and displaced just as the strong displaces the weak. Thus you can see why the beholding spirit is called light, and why it is proper for it to be so. That is the second sense of the term, as employed by the elite.

Now, the light of eyesight is flawed in several ways. It sees other things, but not itself. It cannot see what is too far from it, nor what is too close to it, nor what is veiled from it. It sees the outside of things, not their inside. It sees only part of what exists, not all of it. It sees finite things, not infinite things. Its vision often errs: it takes large things to be small, distant things to be close, stationary things to be in motion, or things in motion to be stationary. These are seven defects from which the outward eye cannot be free. If any eye should exist that is free of them all, I would say that it deserved the name of "light" most of all.

Know, then, that there is also an eye in the human heart which is endowed with this very perfection. This eye is what is called the intellect, the spirit, or the human soul. Yet pay no heed to these expressions, for a person lacking in insight may mistakenly take a multitude of expressions as denoting a multitude of meanings. What we mean is the entity that distinguishes an intelligent person from an infant, a dumb beast, or a madman. We call it the intellect (*'aql*) because that is the term that is given to it in common parlance. Yet the intellect is more worthy of being called "light" than the outward eye is, for it is above having the aforementioned seven defects. Let us examine those defects one by one.

The first defect is that the eye cannot see itself. The intellect, however, perceives itself and its own attributes as well as perceiving others. It perceives that it is endowed with knowledge and potential, and perceives that it knows this, and that it knows that it knows this, and so on *ad infinitum*. Such a power is inconceivable in the case of what is perceived by the physical senses. Beyond this lies a secret that would require too lengthy an explanation.

The second defect is that the eye cannot see what is too far from it nor what is too close to it. Yet proximity and distance make no difference to the intellect, which may soar to the highest heights and plummet to the lowest depths in an instant. In truth

the intellect, with its attribute of transcendence, is not bound by the concepts of proximity and distance at all. The latter refer to physical bodies, whereas the intellect is a similitude of the Light of God; and every similitude is an emulation of the original, though not its equal. This may inspire you to contemplate the secret of the Prophet's ﷺ words, "God created Adam in His own image," though I shall not go into it now.

The third defect is that the eye cannot perceive what is veiled from it. The intellect, however, may roam freely about the Throne, the Pedestal, and what lies beyond the veils of the heavens. It may move within the Supreme Assembly and the higher spiritual realm just as freely as it moves in its own domain, by which I mean the body. No realities whatsoever are veiled from the intellect, unless the intellect veils itself by means of attributes that are akin to the way that the eye is veiled when the eyelids are closed. We shall discuss this further in Part Three.

The fourth defect is that the eye perceives only the outward, superficial aspect of things, not the inner. It sees their receptacles and forms, not their true realities. The intellect, however, penetrates into the inner dimensions and secrets of things, perceiving their realities and spirits and gleaning their causes, reasons, purposes, and wisdoms.

The fifth defect is that the eye only sees some existent things, since all intelligible concepts and many sense objects are beyond it. It cannot perceive sounds, smells, tastes, temperatures, or the faculties of perception, by which I mean the senses of hearing, sight, smell, taste, or the inner attributes of the soul such as delight, happiness, discontent, sorrow, pain, pleasure, passion, desire, power, will, knowledge, and countless other qualities. Its scope is thus exceedingly narrow. It cannot go beyond colors and shapes, which are the most basic things in existence since corporeal bodies are the most basic category of existents, and color and shape are

their most basic accidental qualities. Yet the scope of the intellect covers all things in existence, for it perceives all of the things we enumerated above, as well as those we did not, which constitute the major part. It may roam freely among all of them, and pass judgments upon them that are certain and true. Inward secrets are manifest to it, and hidden meanings are plain to it. How could the outward eye compete with it for the title of Light? It simply cannot. The outward eye may be a light relative to other things, but it is darkness relative to the intellect. Outward vision is merely one of the intellect's spies, charged with watching over the lowliest of its treasures, that of color and shape, and reporting back to it. The intellect then passes judgment on these reports according to the dictates of its piercing insight and powerful judgment. The five senses are its spies, and it has inward spies too: imagination, sense-intuition, reflective thought, recollection, and memory, beyond which lie servants and hosts subjected to its will, each in its specific realm. It sets them to work and exercises control over them as a king does his subjects, and with still greater control. To explain this thoroughly here would take too long; we have done so in the "Book of Marvels of the Heart" in *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (The Revival of Religious Sciences).

The sixth defect is that the eye cannot see what is infinite, as it sees only the attributes of corporeal bodies, which can only be conceived of as finite. Yet the intellect perceives concepts, and concepts cannot be conceived of as finite. It is true that any given piece of information obtained by the intellect in the present moment must be finite; but it has the potential to conceive of the infinite. For example, consider arithmetic. The intellect can conceive of an infinite series of numbers, or indeed the infinite multiplication of a given number. It can conceive of relationships between the numbers that can only be infinite. Indeed, it can apprehend its

knowledge of something, and its knowledge of this knowledge, and its knowledge of this knowledge of this knowledge, and so on.

The seventh defect is that the eye can err, such as by viewing a large object as small. It sees the sun as the size of a bowl, and the stars like coins scattered upon a blue carpet. The intellect knows that the sun and the stars are many times larger than the earth. Likewise, the eye sees the stars as stationary, and even the shadow before it as stationary. The eye sees a child and deems it to be of constant size, while the intellect knows that it is constantly growing, that shadows are in motion, and that the stars move many miles in every blink of the eye. The Prophet ﷺ said to Gabriel, "Has the sun moved?" He replied, "No—yes." The Prophet ﷺ asked, "How so?" Gabriel replied, "From when I said 'No' to when I said 'Yes,' it moved a distance equal to a journey of five hundred years."ⁱ Errors of eyesight are commonplace, but the intellect transcends them all.

You might object that intelligent people make errors of judgment all the time. The explanation for this is that their fantasies and delusions can produce convictions that they mistake for the convictions of the intellect, when in fact they are the errors of those faculties and the intellect is innocent of them. We examined these comprehensively in our books *Mi'yār al-ʿilm* (The Standard of Knowledge) and *Mihāk al-nazar* (Touchstones of Reason). If the intellect is liberated from the stifling dominance of delusion and fantasy, it is inconceivable for it to fall into error, for it will see all things as they are. Yet it is very difficult to liberate it, and it only becomes truly free of these impulses at the moment of death, when veils are lifted and secrets laid bare. It is then that each person will find the good and evil that he sent ahead in life encapsulated before him in a written record *that leaves out neither small nor*

i According to al-Zabīdī's *Ithāf al-sāda*, al-ʿIrāqī found no source for this purported hadith, which is also found in Book 39 of the *Ihyāʾ*: see *Kitāb al-Taḥkik*, *The Book of Contemplation*, tr. M. I. Waley, p. 72.

great, but counts them all (Qur'ān 18:49); and he will be told, *We have removed from you your covering, so today your sight is keen* (Qur'ān 50:22). That covering is the veil of fantasy and delusion. When it is lifted, all who were deceived by their delusions, corrupt convictions, and false fantasies will say, *Our Lord, we have seen and heard, so send us back so that we may do right. Truly we are convinced!* (Qur'ān 32:12).

You can see, then, that the intellect is more deserving of the name "light" than the eye is; indeed, the gulf between them is so vast that we may justly affirm that the intellect alone deserves this name.



You must also note that although intellects are endowed with vision, the objects of their vision are not all on the same level. Some of them are immediately apparent to it, such as self-evident truths. For example, a single thing cannot be both eternal and ephemeral or existent and nonexistent; a statement cannot be both true and false; if a property is possible for one thing to have, it must be equally possible for all things identical to it; and if a given particular is affirmed to exist, the universal class to which it belongs must necessarily exist also. This last principle means, for instance, that if black exists then color must exist, or if man exists then living beings must exist. Yet the converse is not self-evidently true to the intellect in the same way, for the existence of color does not necessitate the existence of black, nor does the existence of living beings necessitate the existence of man. One could go on listing self-evident truths pertaining to necessities, possibilities, and impossibilities. Then there are those truths that are not always immediately obvious to the intellect, but require that it be stimulated and set to work in order to recognize them, such as discursive theories, which must be elucidated by the wise. When

the light of wisdom shines forth, a human being's sight becomes actualized, having previously been only potential. The greatest of all wisdom is the Speech of God Most High, particularly the Qur'ān, whose verses to the eye of the intellect are like the sun to the physical eye, permitting it to see. Thus it is even more fitting to call the Qur'ān "light" just as sunlight is called "light". The Qur'ān is represented by the light of the sun, and the intellect by the light of the eye. In this way we understand the meaning of the Almighty's Words, *So believe in God and His Messenger and the Light We have sent down* (Qur'ān 64:8); and *a proof has come to you from your Lord, and We have sent down to you a clear light* (Qur'ān 4:174).

From all this you will have understood that there are two eyes, one outward and one inward. The outward eye is of the sensory and visible world, while the inward eye is of another world, the Spiritual Realm (*malakūt*). Each eye has a sun and a light which makes it able to see properly. One of these suns is outward, the other inward. The outward sun is of the visible world, i.e. the physical sun. The inward sun is of the spiritual realm; it is the Qur'ān and God's [other] revealed Scriptures. When this is fully unveiled to you, the first door to the spiritual realm will be opened to you. This realm contains wonders that make the visible world seem trifling. Anyone who does not travel to this world but is held back by his shortcomings in the lowlands of the visible world is still a beast, deprived of the distinguishing characteristic of man. Indeed, he is even lower than a beast, for the beasts have not been given the potential to ascend to this world. Thus God says, *Such as these are like cattle; indeed, they are even further astray* (Qur'ān 7:179).

The visible world in relation to the Spiritual World is as the husk is to the kernel, the body to the spirit, darkness to Light, below to above. This is why the Spiritual Realm is called the higher world, the world of the spirit, the world of light, as opposed to the lower

world of corporeality and darkness. Do not suppose that by "the higher world" we mean the heavens, for they are only "high" and "upper" relative to a certain part of the sensory visible world, and they are also perceptible to the beasts. The doors to the Spiritual World will not open to man, nor will he become one of its natives, until *the earth is changed into other than the earth, and so too the heavens* (Qur'ān 14:48) for him. All the objects of the senses and the imagination, including the heavens, must become the earth for him, and his new heaven must become all that is above the range of the senses. This is the first ascension for every spiritual wayfarer, the beginning of his journey towards the Lordly Presence. Man has been reduced to *the lowest of the low* (Qur'ān 95:5), and from there he must ascend to the higher realm. The angels, in contrast, are part of the Spiritual Realm, attached to it in the Holy Presence. Some of them look down upon the lower world. As the Messenger of God ﷺ said, "God created creation in darkness, then emanated His Light upon them" (Tirmidhī 2642). He also said, "God has angels who know the actions of mankind better than they do."ⁱ

When the Prophets ascend to the Spiritual Realm, they reach the ultimate limit and look upon a certain amount of the unseen world; for to be in the Spiritual Realm is to be with God, with Whom are the keys to the Unseen, from which the means that sustain existing things descend into the physical world. The physical world is but one of the traces of that world, like a person's shadow, a tree's fruit, or a cause's effect. The keys to the knowledge of effects can only be obtained through the causes. This is why the physical world is a similitude of the Spiritual World, as we shall see when we examine the Niche, the Lamp, and the Tree; when one thing resembles another, it must be parallel and correspond to it in a certain sense, whether closely or distantly. This is something very

i I have not been able to find a source for this hadith.

profound, and anyone who is granted to glimpse its true nature will easily grasp the meaning of the parables in the Qur'ān.



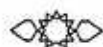
To return to the true meaning of light, we have said that anything that can see itself and other things can rightly be called "light," and that if in addition to these two properties it also makes other things visible, it is even more deserving of this name than something that has no effect at all on other things. Indeed it would be more fitting to call such a thing an illuminating lamp, for its lights emanate to other things. This property is found in the Holy Prophetic Spirit, for through it the lights of knowledge are emanated upon creation. This explains why God calls Muḥammad ﷺ *an illuminating lamp* (Qur'ān 32:46). All of the Prophets are lamps, and so are the *'ulamā'*; but there is an incalculable disparity between them.

Now if it is proper to call anything that provides light to allow sight an "illuminating lamp," then the source from which this lamp is lit may be aptly symbolized by fire. These terrestrial lamps were originally lit from sublime lights, and the Holy Prophetic Spirit *whose oil would well-nigh shine forth, though no fire touched it only becomes light upon light* (Qur'ān 24:35) when fire does touch it. All the more reason, then, why the terrestrial spirits should be lit from the sublime divine spirits that 'Alī ﷺ and Ibn 'Abbās ﷺ described by saying, "God has an angel with seventy thousand faces. In each face are seventy thousand mouths, and in each mouth are seventy thousand tongues. He glorifies God with each of them."ⁱ This spirit is associated with all the angels; as God says, *The day the Spirit and the angels stand arrayed* (Qur'ān 78:38). Insofar

ⁱ Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr* 15/295, cited as a saying of the scholarly Jewish convert to Islam Ka'b al-Aḥbār.

as the terrestrial lamps are lit from it, the only fitting symbol for it is fire; and this fire is sensed only from *the side of the Mount* (Qur'ān 28:29).

And if the heavenly lights from which the terrestrial lights are lit are in turn lit from one another in hierarchical sequence, then the one that is closest to the first source is most deserving of the name "light," being first in the hierarchy. In the physical world, the most apposite symbol of this hierarchy is the light of the moon entering a room through the window and falling upon a mirror on the wall, then reflecting onto the facing wall, then from there to the ground so that the ground is lit by the wall. You know that the light on the ground is from the wall, the light on the wall is from the mirror, the light on the mirror is from the moon, and the light on the moon is from the sun, which shines upon it. These four lights are hierarchical, each being higher and fuller than the next, and each having its own known station and unique level beyond which it cannot stray. Know, then, that for those endowed with inner vision the lights of the spiritual realm are similarly arrayed in a hierarchy according to their proximity to the ultimate Light, such that the level of Isrāfil might be higher than that of Gabriel. The highest rank is the one nearest to the lordly Presence, which is the source of all lights; and their levels range from highest to lowest through countless degrees. All we know is that there are many of them arrayed in ranks, and that they are as they say of themselves: *There is not one of us but has a known station, and truly we are the ranged ones, and truly we are the glorifiers* (Qur'ān 37:164-166).



Now that you are aware that there is a hierarchy of lights, know also that this hierarchy does not extend infinitely upwards but

rather ends at the first source, which is Light in itself and of itself. No light comes to it from without, but all lights shine forth from it in all their ranks. Consider, then: does the name "light" truly befit a thing that borrows its light from another, or the thing that is Light in itself and illuminates everything else? I have no doubt that you can see the truth of this matter, and that you are certain that the name "light" rightly belongs only to the ultimate supreme Light above which there is no other, and from which all other light descends.

Indeed, I do not hesitate to say that when the name "light" is used to mean anything other than the First Light, it can only be in a figurative sense; for all that is not It possesses no light whatsoever in itself and of itself, but borrows its light from another. Its light is sustained not by itself, but by another, and it is only figuratively that a borrowed thing can be attributed to the one who borrows it. If a man borrows a horse and riding apparel, and rides it when and as the lender allows, can we call it "his" in anything but a figurative sense? Is it the lender who owns it, or the borrower? Without doubt, the borrower is as needy as he ever was, and the lender is the rich one, for it is he who lends and owns, and it is he who will take his possessions back in the end.

The true Light, then, is He in Whose hand is creation and command, and from Whom comes illumination first and continuation second. None can share the true meaning of this name with Him or lay claim to it, except in the sense that He Himself extends it to them and graces them with the name, in the manner of a master who gives something to his slave and then calls him its owner. If the truth is revealed to the slave, he will realize that both he and his possessions belong to his master alone, and that he has no share in them whatsoever.

If you understand that Light boils down to self-manifestation and manifestation of the other (*zuhūr* and *izhār*) and its levels,

know also that there is no darkness darker than the obscurity of nonexistence. A thing is called "dark" because there is no way for the vision to reach it; the eyesight does not recognize its existence, although in itself it does exist. But if a thing does not exist at all, either for others nor for itself, does it not deserve to be called the darkest thing of all—as opposed to existence, which is light? For if a thing does not manifest to itself, it does not manifest to others.

Existence may be divided into what an entity possesses intrinsically and what it possesses extrinsically. If an entity's existence is from outside itself, its existence is borrowed and it cannot sustain itself. Considered in and of itself, it is pure nonexistence and exists only through its relation to what is other than itself. That is not real existence, as we saw above in the example of the borrower and the lender. The true existent is God, just as the true Light is God.

From here, the knowers of God ascend from the depths of metaphors to the heights of realities. They complete their ascension and behold with eye-witnessing that there is nothing in existence but God, and that *All things are perishing, except His Face* (Qur'ān 28:88). This does not mean that they will perish at some particular moment, but that they have always been perishing and always will be. It cannot be otherwise, for everything but Him is purely nonexistent when viewed in and of itself, and only existent when viewed from the aspect of the existence that flows to it from the Prime Reality —existent not in itself but solely from the aspect of its Existentiator. Thus all that exists is the Face of God alone.

Everything has two faces: one toward itself, and the other toward its Lord. From the aspect of itself, it is nonexistent; from the aspect of its Lord, it exists. Thus nothing truly exists but God and His Face, and all things but His Face have always been, and will always be, perishing. The knowers of God do not need to wait until the Day of Resurrection to hear the Creator's call, *Whose is the sovereignty this Day? It is God's, the One, the All-Vanquishing*

(Qur'ān 40:16), because they hear this call at all times. They do not take the expression "God is Greater" (*Allāh akbar*) to mean that He is greater than other things—far from it, for nothing exists alongside Him such that He would be greater than it. Nothing is at the level of being alongside Him, or even subordinate to Him. Nothing but Him even exists at all, except from the aspect that faces Him. What exists is His Face alone, and it cannot be said that He is greater than His own Face. What the expression means is that He is greater than any suggestion of comparison or analogy, greater than any notion of His greatness being apprehended by another, even a Prophet or an angel. No one but God can truly know God; and it would not befit the Majesty and Grandeur of God to be reduced to an object of knowledge within the knower's grasp. We have gone into this in greater depth in our book *al-Maḥṣad al-asnā fi Asmā' Allāh al-Iḥṣnā* (The Loftiest Objective: A Commentary on the Most Beautiful Names of God).

After ascending to the heaven of true reality, the knowers of God agree that they can see nothing in existence but the One True God. Some of them experience this as knowledge and gnosis, others as a direct experience and spiritual state that obliterates all multiplicity from their perspective so that they are immersed in pure Oneness. Their minds are utterly enraptured by this state, and they become dumbfounded and have no capacity for the remembrance of anything beside God, not even their own selves. Nothing remains for them but God, and they become so intoxicated that the authority of the intellect is transcended. One of them uttered, "I am the Real!" Another said, "Glory be to Me! How immense is My majesty!" Another said, "Within this robe is none other than God." Yet the drunken words of the lovers are not statements, but allusions. When their intoxication subsides and they return to the authority of the intellect, which is God's balance upon His earth,

they recognize that this was not an actual union, but only a semblance of union, akin to the lover's words in the throes of passion:

I am the one I love, and the one I love is I;
We are two spirits dwelling in one body.ⁱ

One might suddenly look into a mirror without realizing it is there, and think that what one sees in the mirror is actually real, as if the image and the mirror were unified. Or one might see a glass of wine and think that the glass is the color of the wine. If one becomes habituated to this, one will become overwhelmed and cry:

The glass is transparent, and so is the wine;
They both seem alike, and hence the confusion.
It's as if there were wine there, and no glass –
Or there were a glass there, and no wine!ⁱⁱ

Yet there is a difference between saying that the wine *is* the glass and saying that it is *as if it were* the glass. When this spiritual state dominates a person, it is called annihilation (*fanāʾ*). Indeed it is really the annihilation of annihilation, for he is oblivious to himself and to his annihilation, unaware of himself and unaware that he is unaware. If he knew he was unaware of himself, he would not actually be unaware at all. For the person experiencing this state and totally absorbed in it, it is figuratively called union (*ittihād*), though in reality it is nothing other than realization of divine Unity (*tawhīd*). Beyond all this there are other secrets that may not be discussed.

i Lines attributed to the famous Baghdad Sufi Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922).

ii From a poem by Ṣāhib ibn ʿAbbād (d. 385/995).



You may desire to know how exactly Light is attributed to the heavens and earth, or how God Himself could be *the Light of the heavens and the earth* (Qur'ān 24:35). Yet this should not be difficult for you to understand, given that you know that He is Light and that there is no light other than Him, and that He is all lights and the universal Light. For light is the name for that by which things are revealed; and higher still is that *by* which and *for* which things are revealed; and higher still is that *by* which, *for* which, and *from* which things are revealed. The latter is the true Light, and there is no other light above it from which it might draw light and be kindled; for Its Light is intrinsic to It and from It, not from outside of It. You also know that such cannot be said of anything but the First Light. You know too that the heavens and earth are filled with natural light, by which I mean the light of external vision and the light of inner vision; the light of sense and the light of intellect.

The light of external vision is what one beholds in the heavens: the sun, moon, and stars, and what one beholds on earth: the rays that shine upon everything, revealing all the different colors of the earth, especially in springtime, and all the diverse animals, vegetables, minerals, and other kinds of beings. If not for them, the colors would not be manifest; in fact they would not exist at all. Moreover, all the other traits that can be perceived by vision—shape, size, and so on—are perceived through color, without which it is inconceivable that they could be apprehended.

As for the suprasensory lights of intellect, the higher world is filled with them in the form of the angelic substances; and the lower world is filled with them too, in the form of animal life and then human life. It is through the lower human light that the order of the lower world is manifested, just as it is through

the angelic light that the order of the higher world is manifested. This is the meaning of God's Words, *He brought you forth from the earth and settled you therein* (Qur'ān 11:61); *He will surely make them vicegerents in the earth* (Qur'ān 24:55); *He makes you vicegerents of the earth* (Qur'ān 27:62); and *I am appointing on earth a vicegerent* (Qur'ān 2:30).

Once you know this, you will be aware that the entire world is filled with manifest visual lights and hidden intellectual lights, and that the lower lights emanate from one another as light emanates from a lamp. You will know that the Lamp is the holy Prophetic Light; that the holy Prophetic spirits are lit from the higher spirits, as a lamp is lit from fire; and that the higher spirits are lit from one another in a hierarchy of stations traceable all the way back to the Light of Lights, their Origin and Fountainhead, which is none other than God Himself, alone without partner. All other lights are borrowed from Him, and true light is none but His Light. All else is from His Light, or rather it simply is Him, as no other thing has any identity of its own except in a figurative sense. There is no light but Him, and all other lights are only lights from the aspect that faces Him, not from themselves. Every face faces Him, turned towards Him: *wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God* (Qur'ān 2:115). There is no god but He; and the word "god" means that towards which faces turn in worship and deification. By this I mean the faces of hearts, which are the lights and the spirits. Just as there is no god but He, there is no "he" but He; for the word "he" means the object of reference, and no reference can be to anything other than Him. No matter what you refer to, you are referring to Him, even if you are unaware of it because of your obliviousness to the true nature of the things we have discussed here. One cannot refer to the light of the sun, but only to the sun itself; and everything in existence is to Him as light is to the sun. Hence "There is no god but God" is how the masses

affirm the divine Unity, while "There is no he but He" is how the elite affirm it. The former is a more general expression; the latter is more specific, more comprehensive, more true, more precise, and a more fitting affirmation of pure Singularity and total Unity. The kingdom of Singularity is the farthest boundary to which created beings may ascend, and there is nowhere left to ascend beyond it. For ascension implies multiplicity and relativity: there must be something to ascend to and something to ascend from. When multiplicity itself is eliminated, Unity is truly affirmed and relativity is annulled. There can be no reference, for there is no longer any up or down, any high or low, any rising or descending, and ascension is impossible. There is no height beyond the Most High, nor multiplicity with Unity; there can be no ascension as long as multiplicity is negated. If there can be any change of state at all, it is by a descent to the lowest heaven, which is to say a radiation from above to below; for though the Most High has no higher, it does have a lower.

This is the final end, the ultimate aim. Those who know it know it, and those who deny it deny it. It is part of that hidden knowledge which is known only to those who know God—which is why if they speak it, only those who are deluded regarding God deny it.

Regarding the descent of the Almighty into the lowest heaven (Bukhārī 1145), some scholars offer the explanation that it means the descent of an angel, which is not altogether far-fetched. However, one of the knowers of God offered a more radical explanation, and said—while in a state of absorption in the divine Singularity—that His descent to the lowest heaven means His descent into the control of the senses and bodily motions, as alluded to in the words of the Prophet ﷺ [quoting his Lord], "I become his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, and his tongue with which he speaks" (Bukhārī 6502). If God is His servant's hearing, sight, and tongue, then He is the Hearer, Seer, and Speaker, and no

other. This is also alluded to in God's words to Moses ﷺ, "I was ill, but you did not visit Me" (Muslim 2569). This means that the motions of the one who affirms the divine Oneness are from the lowest heaven, his sensations are from the heaven above it, and his intellect is higher still. He rises from the heaven of the intellect to the farthest boundary to which created beings may ascend, the Domain of Singularity with its sevenfold layers. Then after this, he *settles upon the throne* (Qur'ān 7:54) of Unity, whence he *directs the command* (Qur'ān 32:5) throughout his layered heavens. One who looks upon him might well say truly that "God created Adam in the image of the All-Merciful."¹ Looking closer, he might realize that this can be interpreted in the same way as those ecstatic utterances "I am the Real!" and "Glory be to Me!" and indeed those sayings of the Prophet ﷺ, "I was ill, but you did not visit Me" and "I become his hearing, his sight, and his tongue." Yet I fear I must stop there. To say any more might test you beyond your limit.



Now it may be that despite your best efforts you will not rise to the height of this discourse, because your aptitude may fall short of it. In that case, here is something you may find easier to understand. The meaning of His being *the Light of the heavens and the earth* is something you can understand by reference to ordinary visible light. Consider springtime in all its blooming color in the brightness of day. When you behold it, you do not doubt that you are seeing colors; indeed, you might think that you are seeing nothing other than colors, as though you were to say, "I cannot see anything but green." Some have insisted on this, and claimed that light is meaningless and that there is only color, nothing more. They denied the very existence of light, though it is the most manifest of all things. How could it not be, when it is the means by

which all other things are made manifest, the thing that is itself visible and makes other things visible, as we discussed before? Yet when the sun sets, the lamp goes out, and the shadow falls, they realize the essential difference between the locus of darkness and the locus of light; and they admit that there is a meaning to light other than color, and that this meaning is apprehended alongside color, so united with it that it is almost imperceptible, so intensely apparent that it is almost hidden. This intensity might well be the cause of its obscurity, for when a thing goes beyond one extreme it meets with the opposite.

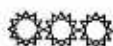
If you understand this, then know also that whenever those who possess inner vision see something, they see God with it. One of them may have gone as far as to say, "I have never seen anything without seeing God before it." Some of them see things through Him, while others see Him through things. The former is alluded to in God's Words, *Is it not sufficient that your Lord is Witness over all things?* (Qur'ān 41:53), the latter in His Words, *We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves* (Qur'ān 41:53). The former bear witness to God directly, whereas the latter infer Him through His signs. The former is the rank of the people of perfected faith (*ṣiddiqūn*), the latter that of those *firmly rooted in knowledge* (Qur'ān 3:6). After these two ranks, there are none but the unaware, the veiled ones.

If you understand this, know also that just as all things appear to outward vision by means of light, so too do all things appear to inner vision by means of God, for He is with all things and never parted from them, and all things manifest through Him. Yet there remains a distinction here, which is that it is possible for ordinary light to disappear with the setting of the sun, whereupon it is veiled and the shadow falls. As for the divine Light by which all things are made manifest, it is inconceivable that It could disappear, impossible that It could set. It remains with all things always. This,

therefore, is where the method of demonstration based on distinction must come to an end. If God could disappear, the heavens and earth would cease to exist, providing a distinction that would compel the recognition of the Cause by which all things came into manifestation. Yet since all things equally attest to the Oneness of their Creator without cease—for all things hymn His praises, not only some of them, and at all times, not only sometimes—the distinction is absent and the method is obscured. For the plainest method of knowing a thing is by reference to its opposite; and if a thing has no opposite, it is difficult to attest to it. That is why God is necessarily obscure, though His obscurity is caused by the very intensity of His obviousness, and it is the very radiance of His brightness that causes people to overlook Him. Glory be to Him Who is hidden from His creation by the very intensity of His manifestation, and veiled from them by the radiance of His Light!

Now when we say that God is with all things in the way that light is with all things, some may mistake this to mean that God is in every place; but He is far beyond any such thing, and one cannot attribute spatial location to Him. Perhaps the best way to avoid this misunderstanding is to say that He is before everything, that He is above everything, and that He manifests everything. That which makes a thing manifest does not part from it, as any person endowed with inner vision understands. That is what we mean when we say that He is with everything. Nor will you fail to see that the thing that makes a thing manifest must be before it and above it, though also with it in a certain aspect; it is with it in one way, and before it in another, which is by no means a contradiction. If you would like an example of this on the level of physical objects, with which you are more familiar, then consider how the motion of the hand is both "with" the motion of the hand's shadow and also "before" it. Anyone whose heart does not have the capacity to understand this should avoid this field

of knowledge altogether. Every branch of knowledge has its own people, and "it will be made easy for each person to achieve the purpose of his creation" (Bukhārī 4949).





CHAPTER 2

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE NICHE, LAMP, GLASS, TREE, OIL, AND FIRE

In order to explain this we first must establish two key principles, the scope of which is boundless, though I shall only allude to them briefly here.

The first principle concerns the secret and method of symbolism: how the spirit of meaning may be fixed in the mold of symbol; the modality of the correspondence between them; and the nature of the parallel between the physical world from which the clay of the symbol is taken, and the spiritual world from which the spirit of the meaning descends.

The second principle concerns the gradations of the spirits of human clay and the levels of light which they possess; for the purpose of this symbol is to elucidate this. Hence Ibn Mas'ūd read the Verse of Light as: *The likeness of His Light in a believer's heart is a niche*, and Ubayy ibn Ka'b read it as: *The likeness of the light of the heart of one who believes is a niche*.

First Principle: The Secret and Method of Symbolism

The world is in reality two worlds: the spiritual and the physical; or, if you will, the intellectual and the sensory; or, if you will, the higher and the lower. All these designations mean approximately the same thing, the difference between them being a matter of perspective. If you consider the two worlds in themselves, you call them spiritual and physical; if you consider them from the perspective of the organ that perceives them, you call them intellectual and sensory; if you consider them relative to each other, you call them higher and lower. Sometimes they are called the world of the Kingdom and of the visible (*'ālam al-mulk wal-shahāda*) and the world of the unseen and of divine Dominion (*'ālam al-ghayb wal-malakūt*). Someone who takes words and then searches for the true meanings behind them will perhaps be confused by these many terms, and suppose that they all mean different things. On the other hand, one to whom the meanings behind the terms are disclosed will always make the meaning primary and the word secondary; a weaker mind, however, will do the opposite, seeking meanings from words. These two types of mindset are alluded to in God's Words, *Is one who walks prone upon his face better guided, or one who walks upright on a straight path?* (Qur'ān 67:22).

Once you understand the meaning of the two worlds, you must then know that the Spiritual Realm is the world of the unseen, being invisible to most people, while the sensory world is the visible world, being visible to all. The sensory world is the place of ascension to the intellectual world. If there were no connection or correspondence between them, there would be no way to ascend to it, and it would therefore be impossible to travel to the presence of Lordship and draw near to God Most High. For no one may draw near to God without standing in the midst of the Enclosure of Holiness. The realm that is elevated beyond the

reach of sense-perception and imagination is what we mean by the World of Holiness. When we consider it in its entirety, such that nothing may leave it and nothing foreign to it may enter it, we call it the Enclosure of Holiness. We might also call the human spirit, which is the channel of the glimmers of Holiness, the Holy Valley. This Enclosure comprises lesser pastures, some of which are more fully imbued with the meanings of Holiness than others, but the word "enclosure" embraces all of its gradations. Do not mistake these words for mere enigmas that those with inner vision do not comprehend. I now observe, however, that my concern with explaining each term as it is mentioned is causing me to digress, and so I encourage you to endeavor to understand these terms for yourself.

Let me now return to the matter at hand. Since the visible world is the place of ascent to the Spiritual Realm, and since "traveling the straight path" is an expression for that ascent, which is also called "religion" or "the mansions of guidance"—and this ascension would be inconceivable if there were no connection or correspondence between the two—the divine mercy decreed that the visible world be parallel to the Spiritual Realm. So it is that everything in this world is a symbol of something in that. A single thing in this world may symbolize many things in the Spiritual Realm, and a single thing in the Spiritual Realm may be symbolized by many things in this one. A symbol is only a symbol if in some manner it represents and corresponds to what it symbolizes. To catalogue all of these symbols exhaustively would require comprehensive knowledge of everything that exists in both worlds, which will ever be beyond our human power; we have not had the acumen to comprehend it thus far, and our short lives will always be insufficient to explain it. The most I can do is acquaint you with an example of them, by way of introducing you to interpretation of this kind, so that from it you may extrapolate others.

I say that if in the Spiritual Realm there are sublime, noble, and luminous substances known as angels from which lights emanate upon human spirits, by reason of which they may be called "lords," and for which reason God might be called the Lord of Lords; and if they are arrayed in a hierarchy determined by their luminosity—if all this be so, then it is only apt that they be symbolized in the visible world by the sun, moon, and stars. The spiritual wayfarer will ascend first to the level of the star, whose light will shine plainly for him to see, and it will be revealed to him that the entire lower world is beneath its authority and the rays of its light. Its beauty and sublime degree will so bedazzle him that he cries out, *This is my Lord!*ⁱ But then when the occupant of the level above becomes clear to him, corresponding to the moon, the star will appear to set in the canopy of the heavens when compared to what lies above it, and he will say, *I love not those that set*. Then again he will ascend until he reaches the level symbolized by the sun, which will appear greater and higher to him; yet since "greater" and "higher" implies comparison and therefore imperfection—since if one thing is comparable to another, it must in a certain sense share its imperfections—the sun too will appear to set before him. It is then that he will say, *Truly I have turned my face to the One Who originated the heavens and the earth, as a man of pure faith*. The term "the one who" is a reference to something vague and devoid of correspondence; if someone enquired after a symbol

i *Thus did We show Abraham the dominion of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those possessing certainty. When night darkened around him, he saw a star and said, 'This is my Lord!' But when it set, he said, 'I love not those that set.' Then when he saw the moon rising, he said, 'This is my Lord!' But when it set, he said, 'Unless my Lord guides me, I will surely become one of those who are astray.' Then when he saw the sun rising, he said, 'This is my Lord; this is greater!' But when it set, he said, 'O my people, truly I renounce the partners you attribute to God. Truly I have turned my face to the One Who originated the heavens and the earth, as a man of pure faith; and I am not of the idolaters.'* (Qur'ān 6:75-79).

that directly corresponds to the term "the one who," one could not conceive of a satisfying answer. The being that transcends all correspondence is none other than the One True God. When a Bedouin man asked the Messenger of God ﷺ, "To what does God relate?" the answer was revealed: *Say, 'He, God, is One. God, the All-Sufficing. He neither begot, nor was begotten. And there is none comparable to Him'* (Qur'ān 112:1-4). What this means is that He transcends all relations.

When Pharaoh said to Moses, *And what is the Lord of the Worlds?* (Qur'ān 26:23), as if demanding to be informed of the true nature of His Essence, Moses answered him only by reference to His Acts, since that would better answer the question. So he said, *The Lord of the heavens and the earth* (Qur'ān 26:24)—to which Pharaoh said to those around him, *Do you not hear?* (Qur'ān 26:25), as if condemning him for evading the question. Then Moses said, *Your Lord, and the Lord of your forefathers* (Qur'ān 26:25). Pharaoh then called him a madman, since what he wanted was a direct symbol or description of the divine Essence, but Moses replied only about the Acts. *He said, 'Truly your messenger who has been sent to you is a madman!'* (Qur'ān 26:26).

Let us now return to our example for the symbolic method. The science of dream interpretation illustrates the value of symbolism, for "Dreams are part of prophethood" (Muslim 2263). Consider how, in dreams, the sun represents the sultan because of the spiritual meaning they have in common, namely dominance and influence over all. The moon represents the minister, for the sun shines its light upon the world through the mediation of the moon when it is absent, just as the sultan shines his lights through the minister upon those who are not in the sultan's presence. If a man dreams that he has upon his hand a signet ring with which he seals the mouths of men and the loins of women, this symbolizes that he will be a muezzin who calls for the prayer before dawn in Ramaḍān. If

a man dreams that he is pouring oil into an olive, this means that his concubine is his own mother, unbeknownst to him.

I could give endless other examples to convince you of this, but what I will say is that just as some higher spiritual beings may be symbolized by the sun, moon, and stars, others may be symbolized by other things from the perspective of characteristics other than luminosity. For example, if a higher spiritual being is immutable and never changes; if it is great and never diminishes; and if waters of mystical truths flow from it into the valleys of human hearts, carrying in them precious minerals of unveiling, then it is symbolized by a mountain. If the beings that receive those precious minerals are of diverse quality, some superior to others, then they are symbolized by a valley. If after those precious minerals connect with human hearts, they flow from one heart to another, then those hearts are also valleys. The head of the valley represents the hearts of the Prophets, then the sages, then those who follow them. If these valleys are lower than the first and receive their water from it, the first must surely be the Rightmost Valley,ⁱ on account of its manifold rightness and high status. If the lower valley receives from the final levels of the Rightmost Valley, then it is watered from the bank of the valley, not from its deepest part or its center.

And if the spirit of the Prophet is *a luminous lamp* (Qur'ān 33:46), and this lamp was kindled by the mediation of Revelation, as God says, *We revealed unto thee a Spirit from Our Command* [Q.42:52], then the symbol of the source of that kindling is fire. Those who receive from the Prophets are divided into those who merely emulate what they hear, and those who have a portion of inner vision. The symbol of the share of one who merely emulates is a report, while the symbol of the share of one graced with inner

i And when he reached it, he was called from the right bank of the valley, from a tree in the sacred ground: "O Moses, I am God, the Lord of the Worlds!" (Qur'ān 28:30).

vision is a fire-brand, torch, or meteor. One who has experiential taste shares in some of the Prophet's states, which is symbolized by warming: to be warmed by a fire one must be near it, not merely hear a report of it.

If the first station of the Prophets is the ascent to the transcendent holy realm away from the turbidity of sense and fantasy, that station is symbolized by the Holy Valley. And since one cannot tread that valley without first doffing the two worlds, this world and the Hereafter, and turning towards the One Real—for this world and the Hereafter are correlatives and accidents of the luminous human substance, which may be doffed and donned at will—the symbol of their doffing is the removal of the sandalsⁱ for entrance into the state of consecration for pilgrimage, when one turns towards the Ka'ba of Holiness.

Let us ascend to the Presence of Lordship once more, and say that if there is anything in that Presence by which knowledge in all its diversity is engraved upon the substances that receive it, it is symbolized by the Pen. If there is an element in those receiving substances that first receives, it is symbolized by the [Preserved] Tablet (Qur'ān 85:22); and if there is another element that transmits to others, it is symbolized by *the Outspread Parchment* (Qur'ān 52:3). If there is something above the inscribing Pen that controls it, its symbol is the Hand. If there is something that embodies and orders the combined presence of Hand, Tablet, Pen, Book, then its symbol is the Image. If the human image has its own order in the same likeness, then it bears the Image of the All-Merciful. There is a difference between saying "made in the image of the All-Merciful"

i Have you heard tell of Moses? He caught sight of a fire, and he said to his family, 'Stay here. I see a fire. Perhaps I may bring you a brand from it, or find guidance at the fire.' Then when he reached it, he was called, 'O Moses! Truly I am your Lord. So remove your sandals, for you are in the holy valley of Tuwā.' Q. 20:9-12.

and "made in the image of God," for the divine Mercy is what caused the divine Presence to have this image. Then God graced Adam and gave to him His own Image, which comprised and embraced every genus in the world, as if he himself were the world entire, or a comprehensive copy of it. This Image—the Image of Adam—was inscribed in God's own Script, the divine Script that is neither characters nor letters, for His Script transcends both, just as His Speech transcends voice and syllable, His Pen transcends wood and reed, and His Hand transcends flesh and bone. Were it not for this mercy, a human being would be unable to know his Lord, for one cannot know one's Lord unless one knows oneself. Thanks to the effect of this mercy he was made in the image of the All-Merciful, not in the image of God, for the Presence of Godhead is not the same thing as the Presence of All-Mercy, which again is distinct from the Presence of Kingship and the Presence of Lordship. Thus He commands us to seek refuge with all of these presences: *Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, the King of mankind, the God of mankind* (Qur'ān 114:1-3). But for this, it would have been more appropriate to say "in His image," but the authentic wording of the hadith is "God created Adam in the image of the All-Merciful."¹

To explain the differentiation between the presences of Kingship, Godhead, and Lordship would take far too long, so we shall not do so here but will let the example we have provided suffice. This subject truly is an ocean without a shore. If you find any aversion in your soul to these symbols, then let the Words of God Most High console your heart: *He sends down water from the sky so that the riverbeds flow according to their capacity, and the torrent carries a foam that swells; and from that which they smelt in the fire, desiring ornaments or utensils, there is foam like it. Thus does God set forth truth and falsehood. As for the foam, it passes away as dross, while that which is of use to mankind lingers in the earth.*

Thus does God devise similitudes (Qur'ān 13:17). Exegetes relate that the water symbolizes knowledge and the riverbeds symbolize hearts.

A summary, and a word of caution: do not suppose that this example of the symbolic method is my way of permitting you to dismiss the outward meaning of the text altogether, such as by saying that Moses was not really wearing sandals, and did not truly hear himself addressed by the Words, *Remove your sandals*. God forbid! Dismissing the outward meaning is the way of the Bāṭinī sect, the allegorists who regard the two worlds one-sidedly and so see only the spiritual one, which they misunderstand entirely because they are unaware of the equilibrium that exists between it and its counterpart. They are the other side of the coin from the Ḥashawī sect, the extreme literalists who deny the secret meanings that hide behind the outward import of the text. The Ḥashawī cares only for the exoteric, the Bāṭinī only for the esoteric; he who combines them both is perfected. Therefore the Prophet ﷺ said—or it may have been related from 'Alī—"The Qur'ān has an outward and an inward, a boundary and a horizon."²

On the contrary, what I say is that Moses understood the command to remove his sandals to mean that he should cast off the two worlds, and so he obeyed the command outwardly by removing his sandals, and inwardly by casting off the two worlds. This is what interpretation (*i'tibār*) means, which is literally a "crossing" (*'ubūr*) from one thing to another, from the outward to the inner secret. One person hears the Prophet's ﷺ words "The angels do not enter any house containing a dog" (Bukhārī 3225), but acquires a dog to keep in his house anyway and says, "He did not mean this literally, but meant that the house of the heart must be kept free of the dog of anger because it blocks mystical knowledge, which is the light of the angels, since anger is the ghoulish that haunts the intellect." What a difference there is between such a person and

another, who obeys the outward meaning of the command and then says, "A dog is not defined by its image, but by its idea, which is viciousness and voracity. If it is necessary to protect the house, which is the seat of the person and the body, from the outward form of currishness, it must be all the more necessary to protect the house of the heart, which is the seat of the true unique substance, from the evil of currishness. I shall therefore conform to both the outer meaning and the inner secret." Such a person is the perfected one of whom it is said, "The perfected one is he who does not let the light of his mystical knowledge extinguish the light of his piety."

Likewise, the perfected one does not allow himself to neglect any ordinance of the Sacred Law, despite the perfection of his inner vision. To do so is a grave error into which some wayfarers have fallen, allowing themselves to roll up the outward import of the Law as though it were a carpet. One such might even go so far as to cease performing the ritual prayer, claiming that he is always inwardly praying. That is aside from the error of the foolish libertines who are in the grip of idiotic notions such as "God does not need our deeds" or, as some say, "We are so laden with vices that we could not possibly purify ourselves, nor could we ever hope to eradicate our anger and lust," as if they have been commanded to eradicate them. These are plain idiocies. The error we were speaking of, however, is a fall from on high, wherein Satan envies a spiritual wayfarer and so tempts him into delusion.

To return to the subject of the sandals, we said that the literal doffing of the sandals signifies casting off the two worlds; the literal significance of the symbol is upheld, and its performance leads to the secret meaning within. Those who are aware of this significance are the ones who have reached the level of the Glass, as will be explained later. The imagination, from whose clay symbols

i Some editions have "This is the worst error of..."

are formed, is hard and opaque, veiling you from secrets and blocking you from lights. But when it is purified so that it becomes transparent like glass, it no longer blocks the lights but becomes a channel for them; moreover, it becomes a protective casing that prevents gusts of wind from extinguishing them. More will be said about the Glass later. In the meantime, know that the dense lower imaginal world becomes for the Prophets a glass and a niche for lights, a filter for secrets, a place from which to ascend to the higher world. From this we can see that the outward meaning of the symbol is true, and a secret lies behind it. The same applies by analogy to a mountain, a Fire, and other symbols.

When the Prophet ﷺ said, "I saw 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn 'Awf enter Paradise crawling,"³ you should not imagine that he did not actually see that with his eyes. In reality, he saw it in the waking world in the same manner as a sleeping person would see it in a dream, even though 'Abd al-Rahmān was asleep in his house at the time. The reason why sleep usually has an effect on these kinds of visions is that it overwhelms the dominance of the senses which usually stifle the inner Divine Light, distracting the person and drawing him towards the sensory world and away from the unseen Spiritual World. Yet the Prophetic Lights can be so strong and bright that the senses cannot compete with them, such that the Prophet sees in the waking world what others only see in dreams. And when the image is of the utmost perfection, its apprehension is not limited to the visible form alone but passes on from it to the secret inner meaning. Thus the Prophet ﷺ was shown how faith pulls towards the higher world that is called Paradise, while wealth and riches pull towards the present life, which is the lower world. If the pull towards the present life is the stronger of the two, the path to Paradise will be blocked; and if the pull of faith is stronger, the path to Paradise will be followed, though slowly and with difficulty, which in the visible world is symbolized by crawling.

In this manner the lights of secrets were communicated to the Prophet from behind the glass of imagination. Nor was his judgment confined to 'Abd al-Rahmān alone, though he was the only one present in the vision; rather it extended to everyone blessed with strong insight and firm faith but also saddled with wealth so vast that it threatens to crowd out that faith, though in the end the faith will win out. This shows you how the Prophets perceive forms and behold the meanings that lie beyond them. Usually the meaning is presented to the inward vision first and then passes to the imaginal spirit, where it is imprinted with a concrete form that communicates the meaning by analogy. This aspect of revelation in the waking world requires the same interpretation that dreams do. When such a vision occurs in a dream it constitutes one forty-sixth of the special gifts of Prophethood. When it occurs in the waking world it constitutes a greater part than that—as much as one third, I believe. For what has been disclosed to us is that the various Prophetic gifts are reducible to three types, and this is one of those three.

Second Principle: The Gradations of Luminous Human Spirits

In knowing this, we may understand the symbols of the Qur'ān.

The first of them is the sensory spirit (*rūḥ ḥassās*), which is what receives the transmissions of the senses. It is the root and origin of the animal spirit, the thing that defines what an animal is. It is present in a newborn child.

The second is the imaginal spirit (*rūḥ khayālī*), which “writes down” and retains what the senses transmit, keeping it stored so that it can present it to the intellective spirit above it when necessary. The newborn child does not possess this in the beginning, which is why it may show great enthusiasm for an object in its presence, but then forget it the moment it disappears from sight

without pining for it at all. Then when it grows a little older, it cries for such objects and demands to have them back, because the image of them is now retained in its imagination. Some animals also possess this, though not all. The moth, for instance, throws itself towards fire because it is entranced by the light and imagines that the lamp is an open passage into the bright place, and so flies directly into it and harms itself. Yet a moment later after it passes into darkness, it flies back into it over and over. If it possessed the imaginal spirit to retain the memory of the pain it experienced, it would not repeat it after the first time. A dog, on the other hand, will flee from a stick after being hit with it a single time.

The third is the intellective spirit (*rūḥ ʿaqlī*), which apprehends meanings that are external to sense and imagination. This is the unique human substance that is not present in animals or infants. The objects of its perception are the universal self-evident axioms, as we discussed earlier when explaining how the light of intellect has precedence over the light of the eye.

The fourth is the discursive spirit (*rūḥ fikrī*), which takes purely intellective data and subjects them to composition and combination, thereby producing informative conclusions. It then takes these conclusions and creates further combinations from them, producing additional conclusions, and so on *ad infinitum*.

The fifth is the Holy Prophetic Spirit (*rūḥ qudsī nabawī*), which is reserved only for the Prophets and certain saints. In it are disclosed glimmers of the unseen, eschatological truths, and certain mysteries of the kingdoms of heaven and earth, as well as lordly mysteries that the intellective and discursive spirits cannot reach. This is alluded to in the Words of God Most High: *And thus have We revealed to you a Spirit from Our command. You did not know what Scripture was, or faith; but We made it a light whereby We guide whom We will of Our servants. Truly you are guiding to a straight path* (Qurʾān 42:52).

Now although you may be confined to the world of the intellect, there is nothing to say that there should not be another plane beyond it, wherein things manifest that do not do so on the plane of the intellect. For the intellect itself lies beyond the plane of discrimination and sensation, and in it are manifested many wonders and marvels which the faculties of discrimination and sense could never reach. Do not suppose that the fullest measure of perfection stops at your own limits. If you would like an obvious example of how some humans have aptitudes that others do not, consider the poetic sensibility, which is after all a mode of perception, and how some are gifted with it to the exclusion of others, who cannot tell one meter from another. Consider how others are endowed with tremendous powers of taste, so that they can produce music and melodies with all manner of effects: some inspire melancholy, others rapture; some send one to sleep, others set one weeping; some drive people to madness, others rouse them to violence, and others still make them swoon. Yet these effects only work on those who have at least a modicum of sensibility. A person devoid of this might stand bemused as the fellow beside him swoons or goes into ecstasy while he himself is unmoved, though they are both hearing the same sounds. All the sages and master artists in the world could not teach such a person how to experience this sensibility.

So there you have an example from the most basic level that is most readily understood, which you may then apply to the matter of the special Prophetic sensibility. Endeavor to become one of those who taste something of that spirit, for the saints have an ample share of it. If you cannot do that, at least try to understand the analogies and examples we have provided well enough to become one of those who have discursive knowledge of it. If you cannot do that either, at least be one of those who believe in it. *God will raise the ranks of those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge* (Qur'ān 58:11). Knowledge is above faith,

and experiential tasting is above knowledge; tasting is experience, knowledge is analogy, and faith is unquestioning acceptance rooted in having a good opinion of those who have experience or those who possess knowledge.

Once you understand these five grades of spirit, know also that all of them are lights, for they make visible the different classes of existent things; and although the sensory and imaginal spirits are shared by animals, the grades that pertain to man alone are of a different order that is altogether higher and nobler, having been created in him for a grander purpose. They were created in the animals in order to provide them with an instrument for obtaining sustenance and to subjugate them to man. But in man they were created to serve in the lower world as a net for catching the noble principles of the religious sciences. When a human being perceives a certain person through his senses, his mind may derive a universal and absolute meaning, as we saw in the example of the crawling of 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn 'Awf. Now that you comprehend these five spirits, let us return to examining the symbols in question.

The Symbols of the Verse of Light

One could speak at length about the parallels between the five grades of the spirit and the Niche, Glass, Lamp, Tree, and Oil, but I shall be brief and confine myself to explaining the method for doing so.

Consider first the sensory spirit. If one contemplates its special properties, one finds that its lights emerge from several apertures: the eyes, ears, nostrils, and so on. The best symbol for it in the visible world, then, is the Niche.

Turning next to the imaginal spirit, one finds that it has three properties. The first is that it is made from the dense clay of the lower world, because anything that is imagined must have a

particular size, shape, direction, and spatial relationship to the one who imagines it, whether he imagines it as near him or far from him. It is in the nature of dense objects with corporeal dimensions to be veiled from the pure intellectual lights that transcend such dimensions. The second property of the imaginal spirit is that if this dense imagination is clarified, refined, and disciplined, it becomes parallel and adjacent to those intellectual ideas, and it no longer blocks them from the light. The third property is that in the beginning, the imagination is greatly needed in order to control intellectual data so that it is not disturbed, agitated, or dissipated uncontrollably; for the symbols provided by the imagination serve to hold the intellectual data together.

These three traits are not found in the ordinary world, in the context of visible light, in anything other than glass, which is made of an opaque substance that is clarified and refined until it becomes transparent, allowing the light of the lamp to pass through it while also protecting it from being blown out by draughts or sudden movements. The best symbol for this spirit, therefore, is the Glass.

Third is the intellectual spirit, endowed with the capacity to apprehend exalted divine ideas. The appropriate symbol for this will doubtless be obvious to you from our explanation above of what every Prophet being a shining Lamp signifies.

Fourth is the discursive spirit, the distinctive nature of which is to begin from a single root and then fork into two branches, which then branch off further and further through successive intellectual divisions which become very numerous, finally leading to conclusions which in turn produce seeds of their own kind, which may also be cross-pollinated. In this world, this is symbolized by the Tree. And since its fruits are material for the multiplication, stabilization, and preservation of knowledge, it is only fitting that the tree chosen to symbolize it should not be a quince, apple, pomegranate, or any other tree but the Olive. For the essence of its fruit is its

oil, which is the material that fuels lamps, and which among all oils has the particular property of increasing brightness without giving off much smoke. And if livestock that produce many young and trees that produce much fruit are called "blessed," then it is all the more fitting that a tree whose fruitfulness is infinite should be called a *blessed tree*. And if the branches of pure intellectual thought transcend the relativity of direction and distance, it is only right that it be called *neither of the east nor of the west*.

Fifth is the holy Prophetic Spirit, which is also attributed to the saints. Consider how the knowledge of the discursive spirit is divided into that which must be taught and supplied from without in order for further knowledge to be developed, and secondly that which is so apparent that it is essentially self-taught without external prompting. Therefore it is all the more fitting to say of the holy Prophetic Spirit—which is of an altogether higher order of purity, luminosity, and aptitude—that *its oil would well-nigh shine forth, though no fire touched it*. For there are saints whose light almost shines forth by itself independently of the supply from the Prophets, and there are Prophets whose light almost shines forth independently of the supply from the angels.

One can see, then, how this symbolism corresponds to the gradation of the spirit. And if these lights are arrayed in hierarchy one above the other then sense is the first, serving as the foundation and preparation for imagination, which could only conceivably be established after it. Then after imagination come intellect and discursive thought, which explains why the Glass is the locus for the Lamp and the Niche the locus for the Glass: the Lamp is in the Glass, and the Glass is in the Niche. And if all of these lights are together, one above the other, it is only apt to say of them: *Light upon light!* Strive to understand this; and all success is from God.



In conclusion, this symbol only applies to the hearts of believers or the hearts of the Prophets and saints, not to unbelievers' hearts. Light is meant for guidance, and to stray from the path of guidance is to be in falsehood and darkness; in fact it is worse than darkness, for darkness does not necessarily lead to falsehood any more than it does to truth. Unbelievers' intellects are inverted, as are all their other perceptions, which work together to misguide them. They are like a man plunged in *the darkness of a deep sea, covered by a wave, above it a wave, above it clouds—layer upon layer of layer of darkness! When he holds out his hand, he can scarcely see it. And he to whom God grants no light has no light* (Qur'ān 24:40).

The deep sea is the world and all its deadly perils, evil vicissitudes, and blinding pollutants. The first wave is the wave of desire, which gives rise to bestial attributes and the pursuit of sensual pleasures and worldly ambitions, such that *they enjoy themselves and eat as the cattle eat; and the Fire will be their home* (Qur'ān 47:12). It is only apt that this wave be called dark, for "love makes one blind and deaf."

The second wave is the wave of predatory attributes that give rise to anger, enmity, hatred, resentment, envy, boasting, pride, and avarice. It is only fitting that it too be called dark, for anger is the ghoul that haunts the intellect. It is also fitting that this second wave be the higher one, for anger usually overwhelms desire, and when it surges forth all desires and pleasures are forgotten; lust cannot compete with rage.

The clouds are the foul doctrines, false beliefs, and corrupt imaginings that constitute veils between the unbeliever and faith and knowledge of God, and prevent him from gaining illumination from the light of the sun of the Qur'ān and the intellect. The particular nature of a cloud is that it blocks the sunlight.

Again, if each one of these is dark it is only right to call them *layer upon layer of darkness*. Such darkness would prevent even close things from being seen, never mind distant ones; and thus the unbeliever is veiled from recognizing the miracles of the Prophet ﷺ, though they are readily available and easy to spot. Naturally it is true of such a person that *when he holds out his hand, he can scarcely see it*. Finally, when the source of all lights is the First True Light, as we have seen, anyone who believes in the One God will agree that *he to whom God grants no light has no light*.

This ought to be enough of the secrets of this Verse to satisfy you.





CHAPTER 3

THE SEVENTY THOUSAND VEILS OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS

What, then, is the meaning of the hadith, "God has seventy thousand veils of light and darkness. If He lifted them, the rays of His Face would burn up all who looked upon it"? (Some narrations have "seven hundred" or "seventy thousand.")

Here is my explanation: God Most High discloses Himself in Himself, by Himself, and to Himself, and there is no doubt that the veil is relative to those who are veiled by it. There are three categories of veiled people: those veiled purely by darkness, those veiled purely by light, and those veiled by both light and darkness. Each of these categories contains many subdivisions; that much is certain. Perhaps I could contrive a way to list them all, but I would not be confident in the accuracy or comprehensiveness of such a list, for one could not be certain that this is what the hadith actually means. As for producing a list of seven hundred or seventy thousand, nothing but Prophetic power could perform such a task. I suspect, though, that these numbers are not supposed to be precise, because it is often the case that numbers are used not to represent exact figures but merely to indicate an indefinitely large quantity. God knows best the truth of this, for it is beyond my capacity. All

I can do now is acquaint you with these categories and some of the subdivisions of each.

Those Veiled Exclusively by Darkness

These are the atheists, who *do not believe in God and the Last Day* (Qur'ān 9:45), and who *prefer the present life over the Hereafter* (Qur'ān 14:3) simply because they do not believe in the Hereafter at all. They have two subdivisions. The first are those who are interested in knowing the cause of this world, but attribute it to "nature," which is a certain property situated and immanent in material bodies; yet it is dark, for it is not endowed with knowledge, perception, self-awareness, consciousness, or any light that may be perceived by external vision.

The second are those who are utterly self-absorbed and uninterested in the question of how the world came to be, being content to live as cattle do. They are veiled by their own self-centered souls and dark lusts, and there is nothing darker than the self and its desires. Thus the Almighty says, *Have you seen him who takes his vain desire as his god?* (Qur'ān 45:23), and the Prophet ﷺ said, "Of all false gods, God most detests vain desire."¹ This subdivision can be further divided. There are those who claim that the ultimate purpose of life is to fulfill desires, satisfy lusts, and experience bestial pleasures: sex, food, drink, and clothing. They are slaves of pleasure, which they worship and seek in the conviction that ultimate happiness lies in its acquisition. They are happy to live like cattle, or lower still, even though people may regard them with contempt. Could there be anything darker? Such people are veiled from God by pure darkness, that of their own dark souls.

Then there are those who deem that ultimate happiness lies in domination and conquest, in slaying their enemies and taking captives. That is the view of the Bedouins, the Kurds, and many

other foolish peoples besides. They are veiled by the darkness of predatory attributes, which dominate them and provide them with their greatest pleasure. They are happy to live like wild beasts, or lower still.

A third faction deem that ultimate happiness lies in great wealth and riches, since wealth is the most effective means to the satisfying of every lust and affords a man the potential to achieve his ambitions. They make it their goal to amass money, land, property, thoroughbred horses, livestock, and treasures of gold beneath the earth. You might see one of them spend his whole life braving perilous journey across land and sea in pursuit of wealth which he stingily withholds even from himself, let alone others. It is to them that the Prophet ﷺ referred when he said, "Wretched is the slave of the silver dirham; wretched is the slave of the gold dinar!" (Bukhārī 2886). What could be darker than the delusion that blinds man into clinging onto gold and silver, which after all are only metals with no intrinsic value, no better than pebbles if they are not spent on worthy things?

A fourth faction manage to rise above the ignorance of the rest, employing a little intelligence, and suppose that ultimate happiness lies in the furthering of one's renown and the acquisition of high status, influence, and power. Such people are interested only in how they look to others. One of them might endure hunger and poverty in his own home in order to be able to afford fancy clothes for going out in, lest anyone should look down on him.

There are countless other factions within this subdivision, all of them veiled from God Most High by pure darkness, and they themselves being darkness. There is no need to go on listing every single variety among them after outlining the general type. Among their ranks are some who utter the words "There is no god but God" with their tongues but perhaps only do so out of fear, or to make alliances or curry favor with Muslims, or to gain financial

assistance from them, or simply out of blind allegiance to the way of their forebears. If this confession of faith does not inspire them to do righteous works, then it will not bring them *out of manifold darkness into the light*, for *their protectors are false deities that bring them out of the light into manifold darkness* (Qur'ān 2:257). If the creed affects someone enough to at least make him feel bad for his misdeeds and pleased with his good deeds, he will come out of pure darkness, even if his sins be many.

Those Veiled by Both Light and Darkness

This category has three subdivisions, defined by the origin of their darkness: the senses, the imagination, or corrupt rational syllogisms.

Those who are veiled by sensory darkness are in turn divided into several factions, each of which have gone beyond self-absorption and have in them genuine religious conviction and the desire to know their Lord. The idol-worshippers are at one extreme and the dualists at the other, with many grades between them.

A first faction are the idol-worshippers, who know in general terms that they have a Lord Whom they must put above their own dark souls, and Who is more glorious than all other things. However, sensory darkness veils them from passing beyond the material world, and so they fashion beautiful figures from precious materials, such as gold, silver, and jewels, and take them as gods. They are veiled by the light of glory and beauty, which are among the Attributes and Lights of God but which they have attached to material bodies, and so the darkness of the sensory has turned them from that light; for matter is darkness relative to the spiritual world, as we have seen.

A second faction are found among the remote Turkic people. They have no religion or code at all, yet believe that they have a god who is the most beautiful of all things. If they see a particularly

beautiful human being, tree, horse, or other thing, they fall down prostrate before it and call it their god. They are veiled by the light of beauty alongside the darkness of the sensory, but they are further within the domain of light than the idol-worshippers since they worship absolute Beauty rather than any particular figure, and they do not limit this Beauty to any one thing. What is more, they worship naturally occurring beauty rather than manufactured beauty made by their own hands.

A third faction said, "Our Lord must be luminous in His Essence, majestic in His image, mighty in Himself, formidable in His presence, impossible to approach; yet nonetheless He must be a physical body"—because they cannot conceive of anything metaphysical. They then observed that fire has all of these qualities, and so they worshipped it and made it their god. They are veiled by the lights of authority and majesty, which are among the Lights of God.

A fourth faction claimed that since we have control of fire and can kindle and extinguish it at will, it is not fitting to call it a god. They held that any god worthy of the name must possess all of those qualities as well as having power over us, and we must have no power over it; and they add also the qualities of height and sublimity. Since the study of astrology was widespread among them, it seemed only natural to them to worship the stars: some worshipped Sirius, others Jupiter, and so on, according to their beliefs about the influences of the stars. Such people are veiled by the light of sublimity, luminosity, and domination, all of which are among the Lights of God.

A fifth faction were almost in agreement with the fourth but said that it would not be fitting to worship a lord who sits anywhere along the hierarchy of size among the luminous bodies other than the very top; and so they worshipped the sun, as they deemed it to be the greatest. Such are veiled by the light of Greatness in

addition to the aforementioned lights, in addition to the darkness of the sensory.

A sixth faction rose above the others and said that the sun does not have a monopoly on light but shares it with others, and it does not befit a lord to have to share its luminosity. Therefore they worshipped Light in an absolute sense embracing all the light in the world, claiming that It is the Lord of the World and that all goodness comes from It. Then when they considered the evils of the world, they were reluctant to attribute them to their lord, lest they accuse It of evil, and so they envisaged a great struggle between Light and Darkness and divided the world between the two, some calling them Yazdān and Ahriman. These are the dualists. That is sufficient to illustrate this [first] subdivision, although there are other factions among them besides these.

The second subdivision are those veiled by lights as well as by the darkness of deluded imagination. These are the ones who go beyond the sensory and believe that there is more in existence besides the objects of the senses, but cannot get beyond imagination. Therefore they worship a Being they imagine to be actually sitting upon a throne. The lowest level among them is that of the Corporealists. Then come the various factions of the Karrāmī sect,ⁱ whose claims and opinions I cannot go into here since it would lead to a long digression with little value. The highest level among them are those who deny that God is corporeal and all that this would suggest, except that they attribute a single direction to Him, namely "above," since they cannot conceive of a being that is devoid of direction and cannot be said to be "in" the world or "outside" it. To them, such a being would simply not exist at all,

i A school of thought with literalist and anthropomorphic tendencies. Founded by the Persian theologian Muḥammad ibn Karrām (d. 255/868), the Karrāmīyya were influential in Iran in al-Ghazālī's time.

for it cannot be imagined. They fail to grasp that the objects of the intellect begin where direction and spatial confinement end.

The third subdivision are those who are veiled by divine lights accompanied by the darkness of corrupt rational syllogisms. They worship a God who is Hearing, Seeing, Knowing, Powerful, Willing, Living, and Transcendent beyond direction, but they understand these attributes in a manner related to their own. Some of them might state this outright, saying that God's Speech is composed of articulated letters and sounds just as ours is. Others rise above this and say that His Speech is like our conscious thoughts, which involve neither articulated letters nor sound. For the other attributes such as hearing, sight, and life too, if asked about their true nature they will resort to what is anthropomorphism in spirit, even if they would condemn that by name; they do not realize what the attribution of these qualities to God truly means. Therefore they say that His Will is contingent just as ours is, and that it amounts to a demand or an intention just as ours does. These schools of thought are well known, and there is no need to examine them in detail here. They are veiled by several lights, besides the darkness of rational syllogisms.

Those, then, are the subdivisions of the second category, those veiled by light alongside darkness. All success is from God.

Those Veiled Exclusively by Light

This category too has several subdivisions; they are countless, but I shall refer to three of them here.

The first are those who know the true meaning of the divine Attributes, and that to ascribe speech, will, power, knowledge, and so on to God does not imply the same thing as it does when ascribing them to human beings. Because of this, they are reluctant to describe Him in terms of those Attributes at all, and instead

they define Him in relation to created beings, as Moses did when Pharaoh asked him, *And what is the Lord of the Worlds?* (Qur'ān 26:23). Therefore they say that God, who transcends the meaning of these attributes, is the Mover and Director of the heavens.

Secondly, there are those who rise above this position in that they observe that there is a plurality in the heavens, and that the mover of each distinct heaven is another being called an angel, of whom there are many, and who are to the divine Light what stars are to physical light. It appears to them that these heavens are within another sphere, whose motion determines all of theirs each day and night; and so they conclude that the Lord is the Mover of this greater body that contains all the celestial bodies, since He cannot Himself be a plurality.

Finally, the third group rise higher than this and say that this shifting of bodies by direct contact must be a service to the Lord of the Worlds, an act of worship and obedience to Him on the part of a servant of His called an angel, who is to the divine Light what the moon is to physical light. They claim that the Lord is obeyed by this mover, and that God Most High is the Mover of all not directly, but by command. The explication and nature of this involves much obscurity, rendering it beyond the capacity of most minds as well as the scope of this book.

Those Who Arriveⁱ

All of the aforementioned three groups are veiled purely by light, but there is a fourth group: those who arrive. They also see how this "obeyed one" possesses a certain attribute that seems to contradict pure oneness and total perfection, due to a secret that is beyond the

i *Wuṣūl*, "arrival" is a common Sufi term for spiritual enlightenment, signifying reaching the end of the Path.

scope of this book to reveal, and that this "obeyed one" is to the divine Light what the sun is to physical light, or what a burning coal is to pure fire. They therefore looked beyond the question as to who moves the heavens, or who moves the greater sphere, or who commands that they be moved, and instead considered the One Who created the heavens, the sphere, and the Command.ⁱ They arrived at a Being far beyond everything that their predecessors perceived; for the rays of His Sublime Face burned away every outward and inward vision of the beholders, and they found Him to transcend in His holiness all of the characterizations we have so far described.

This group too are divided. For some, the entire contents of their perceptions are burned away and obliterated, and yet something of their essence remains to behold the divine Beauty and Holiness, as well as to behold their own beauty which they attained upon arriving at the divine Presence. The objects of vision are erased for them, but not the subjective beholder.

Beyond these are the elite of the elite, who are burned away by the rays of His Face and enveloped in the power of His Majesty, so that even their essences are erased and they retain no trace of self-awareness whatsoever, being totally annihilated to themselves with none remaining but the One True God. For them, the meaning of *All things are perishing save His Face* (Qur'ān 28:88) is a matter of personal experience and spiritual state. We alluded to them in Part One, where we noted how they referred to this as "union" and explained how they conceived it. This is the ultimate degree of arrival.

There are also those who do not make this ascent in the gradual manner we described, treading the long path step by step, but

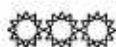
i The progression described here echoes that of the Qur'ānic account of Abraham and his successive visions of the star, moon, sun, and finally the Creator Himself (Qur'ān 6:75-79), which the author examined in Part 2.

instead leap immediately to direct knowledge of Holiness and the true nature of divine Transcendence. They are overwhelmed at the very first by that which overwhelms others only at the very last, and the divine self-disclosure rushes upon them all at once. The rays of His Face burn away all that can be perceived by physical sight and intellectual vision.

One might say that the gradual path resembles the journey of Abraham the Friend of God ﷺ, while the instantaneous arrival mirrors that of our beloved Prophet ﷺ. But God alone knows the mysteries of their journeys and the luminous stations through which they passed.



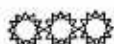
So that is our account of the different categories of veiled people. It may well be that if one were to make an exhaustive study of all the details of the various stations and manifold veils that spiritual seekers can encounter, one would discover that there really are seventy thousand of them after all. But no matter how deeply you scrutinized them, you would find that they all fell within the broad categories that we outlined here. All of them are veiled either by their human attributes, or by sense, or by imagination, or by rational syllogisms, or by pure light, as we have described.





EPILOGUE

This is all that has occurred to me by way of answering these queries, which were put to me unexpectedly while my mind was divided and my thoughts were dispersed between various other matters unrelated to this subject. I ask the questioner to entreat God Most High to pardon me if my pen has erred or my foot has slipped. Investigating the divine mysteries is a hazardous thing to attempt, and seeking to discover sublime lights from behind human veils is as difficult as can be. Peace be with you!





ENDNOTES

THE WAY OF THE Gnostics (*Minhāj al-ʿĀrifīn*)

- 1 Tabarānī, *Kabīr* 5942.

THE MEADOW OF SEEKERS (*Rawḍat al-ṭālibīn*)

Chapter 6: The Meaning of the Soul, Spirit, Heart, and Intellect

- 1 Tabarānī, *Kabīr* 13580.
- 2 Narrated by Ibn Mandah as cited in Iṣbahānī, *al-Ḥujja fī bayān al-mahajja*, no. 310.
- 3 Tabarānī, *Musnad al-Shāmiyyīn* 2662.

Chapter 22: The Meaning of Good and Bad Character

- 1 Aḥmad, *Musnad* 11724.

THE NICHE OF LIGHTS (*Mishkāṭ al-anwār*)

Chapter 1: God Is the True Light, and All Other Light Is Merely Figurative

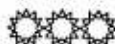
- 1 Tabarānī, *Kabīr* 13580.

Chapter 2: The Symbolism of the Niche, Lamp, Glass, Tree, Oil, and Fire

- 1 Tabarānī, *Kabīr* 13580.
- 2 Tabarānī, *Kabīr* 8667.
- 3 Aḥmad, *Musnad* 24842.

Chapter 3: The Seventy Thousand Veils of Light and Darkness

- 1 Tabarānī, *Kabīr* 7502.



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